DECONSTRUCTION OF FAITH:

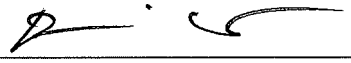
A PASTORAL APPROACH FOR LATIN AMERICAN PENTECOSTAL CHURCHES

by

Esteban Solís, M.A.G.L.

Date: March 1st, 2023.

Approved:



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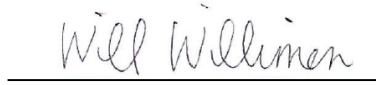

William Willimon, Second Reader and D. Min. Director

Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Ministry
in the Divinity School of Duke University

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ABSTRACT

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Abstract

There is a growing number of people going through deconstructive faith experiences in Latin American Pentecostal churches. Factors like globalization, individualism, high educational rates, the post-colonial experience of the Latin American church, fundamentalism, connectivity, and others contribute to accelerate this trend and shape the environment of faith communities that find themselves amongst increasingly postmodern tendencies. Most pastors are either ignoring the situation, rejecting deconstruction all together, or embracing it blindly. I propose a pastoral response from a distinctively Pentecostal perspective that engages deconstruction of faith critically, while staying open to conceive it as a tool for Spirit-led discipleship that can produce a more mature faith.

I examine six affirmations made by Jacques Derrida that explain deconstruction as something that happens, happens from the inside, is not a method, is call, is a yes to the other, and is affirmative of institutions. Each of these is contrasted with specific examples of cultural changes in Costa Rica, Peter's experience at the house of Cornelius, and a Latin American Pentecostal perspective.

By exploring a variety of authors, I have identified different tools that can help Latin American Pentecostal pastors to better engage in discipleship practices that can produce mature believers in a postmodern era.

Dedication

To my wife, Cristina, and my children Matías and Valeria; their love inspires my life. To the amazing *Iglesia El Centro*, where my wife and I are pastors; I am forever grateful for their investment and support.

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Acknowledgements

I would like to express my profound appreciation to Dr. Daniel Castelo for all his work and feedback during the process of writing this thesis. After writing under his supervision, I can truly see God's hand in putting him on my way.

I would like to thank Bishop Will Willimon whose leadership and support during the Doctor in Ministry program was a constant source of inspiration. I can honestly say, going through this program at Duke Divinity School was a life-changing experience; everyone at Duke Divinity has my sincere gratitude.

1. Postmodernism[1]

The effects of modernism and postmodernism in the Global South have been uneven, different populations have had different degrees of exposure to them. González and González argue that "neither Latin America nor its various forms of Christianity were ever really modern."[2] If this is true, rapid changes in the region will force Latin Americans to leap from a nonmodern world straight to a postmodern one. Yet, Samuel Escobar recognizes the pluriform experience of Latin America not only because of the influence of media and technology, but also missionaries who, by means of evangelization and church planting among pockets of premodern cultures in the region, "are also carriers of modernity."[3] Modern attributes can be found in Latin America throughout all social classes, especially in the capital cities which are also leaning towards postmodernity.

When it comes to Costa Rica it is impossible to say it has been isolated from the effects of modernity. The high levels of literacy the country has had for decades, the widespread communication networks, the presence of European and North American

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[1] There is a difference between postmodernism and postmodernity. Postmodernism refers to an intellectual movement, while postmodernity points to cultural phenomena. In general, I will use the terms interchangeably to refer to the current age the Western world (and other regions) face. See, James K.A. Smith, *Who's Afraid of Postmodernism: Taking Derrida, Lyotard, and Foucault to Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2006), 20.

[2] Ondina E. González and Justo L. González, *Christianity in Latin America: A History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 301.

[3] Samuel Escobar, *The New Global Mission: The Gospel from Everywhere to Everywhere* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 71.

Protestantism for more than a century, and the constant business exchange with foreigners have exposed the general population to the influences of Western ideas and ideals for a long time. Costa Ricans in general have assimilated modern thought and are now embracing a postmodern understanding of the world too.

But what is Postmodernism? Argentinian author Lucas Magnin mentions it is a sort of disenchanting sentiment towards what was before and uncertainty about what is to come. He points out postmodernity is the name Jean-François Lyotard gave to what Bauman called *liquid modernity*, Lipovetski *hypermodernity*, and Beck *second modernity*; its Eurocentric emphasis has led non-European authors to approach the subject with categories such as postcolonialism, peripheric modernity, and others.[4] Lyotard famously defined his term as "incredulity about meta-narratives,"[5] John Caputo clarifies Lyotard's definition does not mean these narratives are "definitely false, just not believable."[6]

Postmodernity can be experienced as a cultural mood or as a philosophical endeavor. Olson explains that as a cultural mood it manifests as skepticism about grand claims to truth, questioning "authority just because it is authority, tradition just because

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[4] Lucas Magnin, *Cristianismo y Posmodernidad: La Rebelión de los Santos* (Barcelona, España: Editorial CLIE, 2018), 24. It is important to note that even when categories such as postcolonialism and postmodernism are both responses to the failures of modernity, such relation does not imply the terms are equivalent. The main difference, as noted, being the Eurocentric character of postmodernism, which will lead to different conclusions as will become apparent in the development of the present work.

[5] Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge.* Trans. Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), xxiii-xxiv.

[6] John D. Caputo, *The Folly of God: A Theology of the Unconditional* (Salem, OR: Polebridge Press, 2016), 73-74

it is tradition and truth claims just because they are truth claims,"[7] that it tends towards destruction and too often becomes "a lazy excuse for radical individualism."[8] Postmodernity as philosophical endeavor, on the other hand, "constitutes a serious disenchantment with modernity and determination to find something to replace it without tossing aside all of the Enlightenment's achievements."[9] So even when there is a sense of discontinuity because of this disenchantment, there is also a sense of continuity with what was before (modernity). This leads Crystal Downing to define postmodernism simply as that which "follows the teachings of modernism," in the sense that it supersedes the modern by questioning its truth.[10] Perhaps that is why John Caputo finds the term *post-structuralism* more appropriate than postmodernism, because it clarifies what was going through the minds of the thinkers who championed this movement, he explains:

> The Structuralists argued that a system like language (and 'culture' at large) is ruled by a deep grammar (structures), which runs beneath the variations in the rules of grammar in the natural languages. These structures see to it that everything that happens in language is governed by a rule, or 'programmed,' literally written in advance. This deep grammar was called *langue* (let's say the structure of language), as opposed to individual empirical

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[7] Olson, Roger E. *The Journey of Modern Theology: From Reconstruction to Deconstruction* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2013), 652.
[8] Ibid., 653.
[9] Ibid.
[10] Crystal L. Downing, *How Postmodernism Serves (My) Faith: Questioning Truth in Language, Philosophy and Art* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2006), 20.

> utterances called *parole,* or 'events' (let's say speech acts, which occur under the rule of these laws. The Post-Structuralists–the 'Sixty-eighters' (*les Soixante-huitaires*), as in 1968–resisted this and argued for a more unruly unprogrammability, a good example is the metaphor–putting an optimal pressure on the rules in order to produce a novel and unpredictable effect–which is what they meant by 'events.' Derrida produced the central document in this debate, which was very appropriately entitled *Of Grammatology*, meaning that the *logos* of *gramme* (trace) is an open-ended *logos* not a closed one, not a *pro-gramme.*[11]

Vanhoozer explains more succinctly that what poststructuralist or postmodern thought rejects are the following modern postulates: "(1) that reason is absolute and universal, (2) that individuals are autonomous, able to transcend their place in history, class, and culture, (3) that universal principles and procedures are objective whereas preferences are subjective."[12] So even when the postmodern or poststructuralist is trying to find new ways to deal with the realities of life, it honestly acknowledges its roots and origins tracing them back to modernity.

Perhaps we could see modernity and postmodernity as a story of misplaced hopes. Modernity placed its hope heavily on human reason and inaugurated a new era of democracies, education, and unparalleled scientific accomplishments. Postmodernity recognizes the unquestionable achievements of modernity, but it is also unwilling to

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[11] Caputo, *The Folly of God*, 27.
[12] Kevin J. Vanhoozer, "Theology and the Condition of Postmodernity," in *The Cambridge Companion to Postmodern Theology*, ed. Kevin J. Vanhoozer (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 8.

deny the general disenchantment in the midst of the totalizing god-like attitudes of modernity and the appalling moral failures of modern societies; no matter how far we got, it was never enough to fulfill humankind's deepest longings.

So, modernity began out of a deification of human reason, while postmodernity started out of disenchantment with this idol. At this point faith finds an ally since "Christianity and postmodernism share a concern to tear down idols."[13] There is much in postmodernity that Christianity can take advantage of; nevertheless, we should never lose sight of the fact the foundation of postmodern thinking is a disenchantment with a misplaced hope. A Christian posture towards postmodernity should remain critical,[14] acknowledging the influence both modernity[15] and postmodernity have had on Christian theology and ultimately on Christian believers.

Two broad categories of Christian theologians have used a postmodern approach to theology in order to counter the effects of modernism in theology: postliberals and deconstructionists.

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[13] Olson, *The Journey of Modern Theology*, 655.

[14] Alan Padgett categorizes Christian responses to postmodernism in one of four self-explanatory categories: the ostrich, the bogeyman, the best buddy, and the critical dialogue partner. In Alan Padgett, "Christianity and Postmodernity," *Christian Scholar's Review* 26:2 (winter 1996): 129.

[15] Nancey Murphy asserts that both conservative theologians (building upon Scripture) and liberal theologians (building upon experience) depend on modern assumptions and methods, but she believes postmodernism can provide a way between liberalism and fundamentalism. In Nancey Murphy, *Beyond Liberalism and Fundamentalism: How Modern and Postmodern Philosophy Set the Theological Agenda* (Valley Forge, PA: Trinity Press International, 1996), 12.

1.1. Postliberalism

Postliberals use narrative, tradition, community, and practice in an attempt to free Christianity from modern influences and transcend "liberalism… and the left-middle-right spectrum of modern theology."[16] For Olson, Stanley Hauerwas and William Willimon present postliberal theology more as a *mood* than a movement:

> We are no longer content . . . to stand on the periphery, hat in hand, apologetically trying to translate our religious convictions into terms palatable to the world. Rather, we are now ready to say that our convictions lay down a program, a vision, a paradigm for accommodating the world to the gospel . . . there is an aggressive, anti-establishment spirit among [postliberals] that we think is right. That is, they challenge both the academy and the church to realize that business as usual cannot continue if Christians are to be intellectually and socially of service in our time.[17]

Postliberalism sees the Bible as "a realistic narrative that, in spite of flaws, conveys a picture of reality that serves as the lens through which Christians view reality… [freely admitting that the Bible] may be history-like without being historical."[18] Another important feature of this mood is that Christianity's primary language is worship and witness, while doctrine is conceived as second-order language functioning

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[16] Olson, *The Journey of Modern Theology*, 656.
[17] Stanley Hauerwas and William Willimon, "Embarrassed by God's Presence," *The Christian Century* (January 30, 1985), 98.
[18] Olson, *The Journey of Modern Theology*, 660-661.

in a "regulative, not constitutive"[19] manner, seeing it more as ministerial (on a servant posture) than magisterial.[20]

An important use of witness involves Hauerwas' perspective on Christian apologetics which always lets modernity set the rules by assuming "the Christian God does not exist in order to work their way back to believing in God on the basis of entirely secular premises;"[21] which is why from a postliberal perspective Christian communication towards society should be more about witnessing than assuming an apologetical stance.

1.2. Deconstructionism

The second branch of postmodern theology is deconstructive theology, which focuses on "commitment to the 'other' and critical exposure of the violent tendencies in all thought systems to move theology away from ideological idolatry toward openness to the new, the different and the unexpected."[22]

What Hauerwas is to postliberal theology, John Caputo is to deconstructive theology. Notable for moving from the field of philosophy to Christian theology, Caputo enacted with this transition the deconstructionist mood: whatever lines modernity drew are nothing but an invitation for those boundaries to be transgressed, for anything that

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[19] Olson, *The Journey of Modern Theology*, 661.
[20] Ibid., 663.
[21] Ibid., 664.
[22] Ibid., 656.

has been constructed can be deconstructed. The postmodern impulse for transgressing boundaries, might simply be a hypermodern manifestation of free will and autonomy, yet it shows the deconstructive mood and how the postmodern showcases both continuity and discontinuity of modern postures. One of the important discontinuities with modernity is the role of religion. Caputo finds that both postmodernity and premodernity share an "openness to the sacred, to transcendence, to religion,"[23] quite an anti-modern posture.

Regarding the kingdom of God and the church, Olson thinks Caputo and Hauerwas would agree with Kierkegaard's portrayal of Christianity as standing in permanent structural opposition to this world; therefore, a sign of its decadence would be to sit at the table with that which it was called to stand in opposition to.[24] Nevertheless, Caputo and Hauerwas differ profoundly in their conception of the church which Caputo simply sees as the apostles' "Plan B"[25] when Jesus failed to return as expected, making it nothing more than a provisional construction. Olson concludes, "Caputo leaves no positive place for the church in his theology. It is just another human institution needing deconstruction and transformation. Hauerwas would agree that the church is not the kingdom of God and that every church needs improvement, but he would shudder at Caputo's cavalier treatment of the Church as if it were a mere

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[23] Olson, *The Journey of Modern Theology*, 696.
[24] Ibid., 700.
[25] John D. Caputo, *What Would Jesus Deconstruct? The Good News of Postmodernity for the Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2007), 35.

afterthought of the apostles when Jesus did not return as expected."[26] So, along with Derrida, Caputo shows strong reservations toward communities because of their "inbuilt tendency to become totalizing and exclusive."[27] Communities set protective boundaries around them, which deconstructionists tend to upset; as a community and an institution the idea of the church does not go very well with deconstructionism.

Concluding remarks

As a pastor in Costa Rica, I find much more influence from deconstructive theology than postliberal theology in the local church context. It is important to remember that both are very critical of modernity, but their approaches and conclusions are very different. Postliberals find great value in the church as a community of believers while deconstructionists tend to be wary about it. Deconstructive theology can also be very lax in its commitment to orthodoxy, Caputo sets an example by being very transparent about his Roman Catholic roots while also dismissing orthodox Catholic believes.

Factors like the ones just mentioned have led evangelical circles to discredit deconstruction, but I believe it can be used in the discipleship of believers if we address it correctly. The effects of deconstructive theology are already making an impact in

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[26] Olson, *The Journey of Modern Theology*, 707.
[27] Ibid.

Costa Rican churches, directly affecting the lives of many believers who, in many cases, receive dismissive or defensive responses from their pastors. Because Pentecostalism represents most Costa Rican churches at the moment, deconstructive theology in the Costa Rican context must be addressed from a Christian Pentecostal perspective informed by the pastoral ministry.

2. Deconstruction

The "genealogy" of the French word *déconstruction* can be traced back across five languages to an unexpected but familiar source.[1] God was tired of dealing with a people whose religious life was a superfluous repetition of human constructions, a poor imitation of worship that lacked any substance. So, YHWH announced to the prophet:

So once again I will do things that shock and amaze them,

and I will destroy the wisdom of those who claim to know and understand.

Isaiah 29.14 CEV

These human constructions resulted in the barren practice of hypocritical religion leading to estrangement of those who YHWH used to refer to as "my people," now plainly regarded as "this people." The once pious faith deteriorated into a "manipulative style of religion typical of paganism,"[2] relegating the central relationship with the Creator to the periphery. Once this happens, attention to the words spoken by God's prophets is neglected, in time of crisis the leaders choose to trust "their own wise and 'realistic' plans."[3] The ineludible conclusion then, is that such human wit must perish, it

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[1] John D. Caputo, *Deconstruction in a Nutshell: A Conversation With Jacques Derrida* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2021), lvii.
[2] John N. Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah, Chapters 1-39*, The New International Commentary on the Old Testament, (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1986), 356.
[3] Richard B. Hays, *First Corinthians*, Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 1997), 29.

ought to be demolished and destroyed so a new and radical future ushered by YHWH can come into existence.[4]

Once these human constructions that have restrained the understanding of God are demolished new things can be born. Oswalt ties this passage with times in history in which God has broken out of the human-made structures in order to bring renewal, as was the case with "Saint Francis, the Pietists, the Reformation, the Wesleyan revival, and most recently, the charismatic movement."[5] One of the foremost examples of times of renewal is found in the life of the Spirit-filled New Testament church. It is during this period that God sends out the Jewish disciples as a missionary people that would stretch as far as the ends of the world, reaching the Gentiles. The most immediate encounter the church experienced was with Greek thought within the Roman empire. In this context the apostle Paul appropriates the words of Isaiah, as he usually does in "sections that are of fundamental importance for his reasoning,"[6] turning to his favorite source he quotes:

As God says in the Scriptures,

'I will destroy the wisdom of all who claim to be wise.

I will confuse those who think they know so much'

1 Corinthians 1.19 CEV

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[4] Hebrew **אבד** (*'ābad).*

[5] Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah,* 356.

[6] Florian Wilk, *"Isaiah in 1 and 2 Corinthians."* In *Isaiah in the New Testament: The New Testament and the Scriptures of Israel*, ed. Steve Moyise and Maarten J.J. (Menken, London: Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, 2005), 157.

For Wilk, the remarkable correspondence between 1 Corinthians 1 and Isaiah 29 LXX shows that "Paul was well aware of the Old Testament context when quoting Isa. 29.14b. However, whereas the verse in its original context concerns Israel, Paul has applied it to humankind in general."[7] The work of Christ at the cross defies both Jewish and Greek expectations. Perhaps both cultures encompass the whole human experience when faced with the divine. Once again human understanding finds itself at odds with the ways of God; therefore, God decides once again to ruin and destroy[8] these human constructions of what the divine should do. Of course, from Paul's perspective the cross is actually the fulfillment of Isaiah.[9]

The theologian Martin Luther followed Paul's steps in rendering foolish the wisdom of the wise when he confronted what he termed "theology of glory," a representation of the theological system of medieval Aristotelianism, against a "theology of the cross." Central to this theology of the cross are the concept and practice of *"destructio,"* the Latin translation of Paul's Ἀπολῶ, which according to Crowe sometimes points to the critical work of the "theologian of the cross" and is concerned with the practical application of truth for the human good, for example in salvation.[10]

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[7] Wilk, *"Isaiah in 1 and 2 Corinthians,"* 137.
[8] Greek Ἀπολῶ (*apolō*).
[9] Wilk, *"Isaiah in 1 and 2 Corinthians,"* 156.
[10] Benjamin D. Crowe, *Heidegger's Religious Origins: Destruction and Authenticity*. Indiana Series in the Philosophy of Religion. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006), 45, 48, 62.

Luther was not only a great influence in Heidegger´s intellectual development but also in his idea of philosophy as *"destruktion,"* a Germanized version of the Latin *"destructio."* Even when the term is never unequivocally defined by Heidegger himself the overall use in his work shows it "is taken to be an activity that is primarily aimed at helping secure the proper *theory* about human life by critically examining traditional ideas."[11] Crowe claims that the ultimate purpose of *"destruktion"* is positive because it attempts "to *liberate* or *free up* [*überliefern*] possibilities from the past for the sake of the future."[12]

It is Heidegger's "*destruktion*" that Algerian-French philosopher Jacques Derrida finally translates as *"déconstruction."*[13] One could trace a connection of ideas associated with deconstruction across these many figures: from the prophet Isaiah, to the apostle Paul, to the theologian Luther, to the philosopher Heidegger, and lastly to the also philosopher Derrida. Of course, it would be naïve to pretend that such history means all authors meant the same or would even agree with each other's conclusions; their contexts and concerns were very different. But, at the risk of being anachronistic, we could say there is a shared realization among all these authors that calcified ideas can hinder humans from enjoying a renewed future.

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[11] Crowe, *Heidegger's Religious Origins,* 45, 47, 236.
[12] Ibid., 260.
[13] John D. Caputo, *Cross and Cosmos: A Theology of Difficult Glory* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2019), 71-76.

But, what exactly is deconstruction in the context of faith? It is explained as, "the dismantling of anything that's been constructed. . . . Theological deconstruction, as such, is the process of dismantling one's accepted beliefs."[14] Brian Zhand's description, "a crisis of Christian faith that leads to either a reevaluation of Christianity or sometimes a total abandonment of Christianity,"[15] shows deconstruction can reconfigure the whole of one's life. Kenneth Archer's succinct definition, "the desert of skeptical criticism,"[16] points us to the possibility of intense emotional and intellectual strain. If we take into account the relationship between deconstruction, the prophetic tradition of Isaiah, and the community in Corinth, perhaps we could suggest the Spirit of God has always been a force that destroys certain aspects of our faith so these can be born anew. This would mean that the Spirit guides believers into a better understanding of faith and a deeper relationship with God, when hardened beliefs have hindered believers from faithfully following God.

Of course, such assertion is bound to produce pushback. As mentioned in the previous section, deconstruction has been discredited in evangelical circles sometimes with good arguments but many times by ill-informed opinions born from defensive or dismissive postures. Because of this I think it is important to learn from the source, not

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[14] A. J. Swoboda, *After Doubt: How to Question Your Faith Without Losing It* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2021), 7.
[15] Brian Zhand, *When Everything is On Fire: Faith Forged From the Ashes* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2021), 26.
[16] Kenneth J. Archer, *A Pentecostal Hermeneutic for the Twenty-First Century: Spirit, Scripture, Community* (New York: T&T Clark, 2004), 7.

in order to agree with the theology of people like Derrida or Caputo, but to learn about the deconstructive way of thinking and finding ways it can be addressed in order to pastor and disciple believers.

In 1994 Villanova University held a round table with Jacques Derrida in the midst of launching the university's new doctoral program in philosophy. The conversation was led by John Caputo who later presented this exchange as a book with significant commentaries in which he elaborates Derrida's responses. The result has been celebrated as an influential work regarding the relationship of theology and deconstruction. In this book Derrida gives important explanations that help us understand deconstruction from his perspective.

From this work, titled *Deconstruction in a Nutshell,* I have identified six sayings Jacques Derrida uses to explain what exactly is deconstruction and what it is not: 1) deconstruction happens, 2) deconstruction happens from inside, 3) deconstruction is not a method, 4) deconstruction is a call, 5) deconstruction is a yes to the other, and 6) deconstruction is affirmative of institutions. . . is not destruction. Summed up together these sayings serve as helpful guide in explaining what deconstruction really is about; it is also very helpful that this book provides an extended commentary from Caputo, who helpfully sets the subject in the environment of faith.

In order to highlight its relevance to the Costa Rican Pentecostal context, I have extended the conversation of each of these six sayings with three related subsections: the

subject's perspective from the Costa Rican religious context, a brief conversation of these sayings in relation to Peter's experience in the house of Cornelius, and finally, an approach from the Pentecostal tradition. Each of these subsections will ultimately lead to addressing deconstruction in the current context of Costa Rican Pentecostal faith communities.

2.1. Deconstruction happens

"Deconstruction is something which happens."[17]

- J. Derrida -

We are born into a world of *différance*, where multiple and overlapping matrices of meaning are already in place, we are part of them, even when they started without us; because of this, deconstruction is highly suspicious of the idea of an autonomous ego that simply decides to deconstruct. Deconstruction is not something we primarily do; it is better understood as something that happens to us; because, as we well see ahead, deconstruction is not a method we impose to a certain subject but a call to which we respond.

This response is precisely where humans have some agency regarding deconstruction. We participate in deconstructive processes either by promoting them via

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[17] Caputo, *Deconstruction in a Nutshell*, 9.

maintaining an open posture or by resisting them and trying to prevent them; the second option is not the best since the unrelenting event will likely take place whether we like it or not.[18] For Caputo such a process comes from God (an unorthodox version of God as we will see, but still God). We may not invite God, but he still comes uninvited to shatter our misdirected conceptions: "God, what is going on in the name of God, is not a projection but a projectile headed straight at us, a missile upending our narcissistic desires, a visitation that comes without invitation."[19] What is left for us is not defining if we want to deal with deconstructive forces, but how we decide to deal with them.

2.1.1. Costa Rican Context: Unexpected, Unrelenting forces

Deconstruction is not a philosophical proposition with no consequences in the real world. Events with the power to profoundly transform, or deconstruct, our worldview and faith can happen when we least expect it. This is evident when we look at the history of the encounter between the pre-Columbian Latin American populations and the European colonialists.

Christopher Columbus first arrived in America in the year 1492 while trying to find a direct way from Western Europe to Asia. This was the age of the "Catholic Kings," a time in which "Spain was entering upon the age of its greatest power and the

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[18] See Caputo, *The Folly of God*, 26.
[19] Caputo, *Hoping Against Hope*, 125.

decisive construction of its image as the standard-bearer of Catholicism."[20] The times of relative tolerance between Christianity, Judaism, and Islam in that area were over. The long crusades shaped the identity of the empire, creating an intolerant and violent atmosphere. The elite's desire for political and religious orthodoxy resulted in the creation of the infamous Inquisition which indicates a significant shift in theological history. In previous times the patristic treatment of heretical ideas focused on the threat heresy represented to the Christian faith; the Inquisition, on the other hand, was more concerned with protecting individuals and institutions, branding many movements as heretical for political reasons.[21]

The accidental arrival to American lands was interpreted as an act of God that confirmed the special role of Spain in history and the divine support of the Catholic kings. In 1493 Pope Alexander VI granted the kings of Spain and Portugal the *patronato*, "total responsibility for evangelization of all the new lands their subjects were uncovering."[22] This allowed religious and political authorities to justify an invasion as evangelization. This evangelistic campaign was led primarily by Conquistadores, a group of men chiefly motivated by the love of gold and making a name for themselves.

It took 10 years after the first Spanish incursion in the Americas for the Spaniards to find their way to Costa Rica. In 1502 Columbus himself arrived in the Atlantic coast

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[20] Adrian Hastings, *A World History of Christianity* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1999), 328.
[21] Alister McGrath, *Heresy: A History of Defending the Truth* (New York, NY: Harper One, 2009), 208.
[22] Hastings, *A World History of Christianity*, 329.

now known as Limón. According to calculations made by bishop Thiel, at the time of the Spanish conquest there were 27,000 indigenous people in Costa Rica distributed among five different tribes. Many Costa Ricans at the time believed in *Sibú*, the Supreme Being who gave origin to men and nature by planting seeds; they worshipped natural elements such as the Sun and the Moon. Historian Ricardo Fernández asserts that even when native peoples such as the *Chorotegas* (located on the opposite side of where Columbus first arrived) were always submissive to the Spaniards, this did not stop the conquerors from treating them in the cruelest ways, almost completely obliterating a smart, cult, and gallant people.[23] This treatment of aboriginal people by the Spaniards was very similar in all of Latin America, leading to the collapse of aboriginal populations throughout the Spanish-conquered territories; this in turn, prompted the "importation of black slaves from Africa to replace the natives they were wiping out."[24]

The violent conquest came hand-in-hand with the first experience of the gospel for Latin Americans. In 1522, for example, the Catholic leader Diego de Agüero claimed to have baptized and converted 6,000 Chorotega people in Costa Rica, even when neither group understood each other's language at the time.[25] From that moment on

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[23] Ricardo Fernández Guardia, *Historia de Costa Rica: El Descubrimiento y la Conquista* (San Jose, CR: Librería Lehmann & CIA., 1941), 9.
[24] Hastings, *A World History of Christianity,* 332.
[25] Clifton L. Holland, *Religión en Costa Rica*, Programa Latinoamericano de Estudios Sociorreligiosos PROLADES (January 25th, 2002), 1. Last Accessed January 29, 2016. http://www.prolades.com/costarica/religion.pdf

Costa Rica defined its religious identity as distinctly Catholic, to the point that even now the country remains as one of the few officially confessional states in the world.

The unexpected encounter between Spaniards and Costa Ricans that *just happened* by accident, completely transformed the worldview and day-to-day reality of entire people groups. This produced an ever-growing complexity of the Costa Rican experience in all arenas of life. Regarding religion, aboriginal spirituality was overcome by Catholic faith which in turn was forced to endure other expressions of faith.

By 1840's the first Protestant service in Costa Rica was celebrated by North American, British, and German citizens; surrounded by a religiously intolerant atmosphere. The railroad construction by Afro-Caribbeans provided the opportunity for the first Protestant missions in the country, these where first carried out by the Jamaican Baptists Missionary Society in 1887. Other protestant missionary endeavors followed afterwards: Wesleyan Methodists in 1894, Anglicans in 1896, Seventh Day Adventists in 1903, and Salvation Army 1907. Pentecostal missionaries started arriving around ten years after the Azusa Street's Revival in 1918.[26]

As it happened, no Protestants died in Costa Rica because of religious intolerance as did happen in other Central American countries. Nevertheless, non-Catholic believers were victims of violence on a regular basis, not just by being publicly humiliated, but it was common that stones would be thrown at them, their houses, and churches. Many

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[26] Holland, *Religión en Costa Rica*, 2.

even experienced discrimination and negligence when receiving medical attention, to the point that an evangelical hospital, *Clínica Bíblica*, had to be opened in 1929 to guarantee the correct medical attention of non-Catholic patients.[27]

Between 1946 and 1982 the evangelical movement in Costa Rica started developing at a fast rate. Different evangelical ministries with nation-wide impact started flourishing such as radio stations, schools, camps, missionary institutions, pastoral schools, and country-wide evangelistic campaigns. By 1978 the twelve biggest Protestant denominations in the country summed up 513 local churches holding together 32,038 people.[28]

All the upheaval that resulted in the present Latin American reality came to be by the accidental encounter by two peoples who were not even looking for each other. Human greed and perversion distorted what could have been a reciprocally benefiting experience. Derrida´s simple assertion, the recognition that it just "happens," points us to the human experience of the unexpected. This brief historical account shows humans are constantly and unexpectedly exposed to forces strong enough to reshape our understanding of the world, impact our beliefs, and literally change the trajectory of our lives.

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[27] Clifton L. Holland, *Historia de la Iglesia Evangélica Costarricense: Reseñas Históricas Denominacionales*, Programa Latinoamericano de Estudios Sociorreligiosos PROLADES, ed. 11 Nov, 2017, Guanacaste, Costa Rica., 17-18.
[28] Holland, *Historia de la Iglesia Evangélica Costarricense*, 19, 21.

The belief systems of whole nations changed by an unexpected encounter. This is the sad history of the gift of the Gospel in Latin America. Once the encounter happened it could not be undone. There is no use in blaming the casual bystanders at the beach. Once they saw the weird looking strangers in the boat, they could not unsee them. Something is bound to happen with the potential of bringing great gifts or great pain, many times both. Such is the nature of deconstructive experiences: they happen. The question is *how* can we approach them.

2.1.2. Peter in Cornelius's House: Deconstruction Happens

Once upon a time, there was an apostle to whom something just happened, something that would change his faith life forever as well as history itself. The book of Acts chapter 10 narrates the encounter between the apostle Peter and Cornelius, a man that could be described as a successful leader, a disciplined person, a family man, or a devout believer; but in Peter's eyes he was primarily a Gentile. The apostle was about to have an experience that would dismantle his mental constructions about Cornelius and the other Gentiles, and ultimately his conception about what God could and would do. This event would cause a personal crisis in him that would lead him to reevaluate how he practiced his faith, but first he would skeptically critique the whole experience. To put it simply, Peter was about to have his faith deconstructed.

The spiritual experience both men had would sound very familiar to any Latin American Pentecostal. Both positioned themselves to be exposed to God's voice by faithfully searching for him. Cornelius had a revelatory experience, a vision that provided instructions;[29] Peter underwent an ecstatic trance[30] that would defy core beliefs. This was a divine initiative they could not elicit. They could only position themselves to be exposed to what the Spirit of God was preparing. From their perspective *it just happened*. God was about to do something new and the faithful apostle, a direct disciple of the incarnated Christ, filled with the Spirit, was about to be further transformed.

The Bible points us to the reality that unexpected circumstances can profoundly transform human beings. It is easier to see the agency of God when we have a biblical author making explicit connections; it may be harder to discern it in more recent historical events. But we cannot deny that from a biblical perspective the Spirit actively moves so his people can be transformed.

2.1.3. Latin American-Pentecostal Perspective: The Spirit is Actively Making Things Happen

The Pentecostal movement feels at home when it comes to unexpected happenings. Even when Pentecostalism is not denominational per se but a "renewal

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[29] Greek, ὁράματι.
[30] Greek, ἔκστασις.

movement that emphasizes the experience of God,"[31] one can identify distinctive Christian beliefs among those who partake in the Pentecostal identity. One of the movement's core tenets identified by Albrecht and Howard is the belief in Christ the Spirit-Baptizer and Sanctifier. This belief finds expression in the Pentecostal understanding of the Spirit as constantly active: "Pentecostals expect the Holy Spirit to speak to them, to touch their hearts through strong emotions, to reveal something of God to them through ideas and pictures that come to their minds or through dreams."[32]

Pentecostals expect the unexpected in the Spirit, [33] even if the experience itself is not necessarily as supernatural as a vision or a trance; the main idea is that the Spirit is always at work in surprising ways. This pneumatological imagination[34] drives Pentecostal Christianity to "[a] radical openness to God . . . a fundamental openness to alterity or otherness . . . to the continuing (and sometimes surprising) operations of the

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[31] Daniel E. Albrecht and Evan B. Howard, "Pentecostal Spirituality," in *The Cambridge Companion to Pentecostalism*, edited by Cecil M. Robeck, Jr and Amos Yong, Cambridge Companions to Religion (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 235.
[32] Ibid., 237.
[33] Wariboko and Yong point out that Pentecostals and evangelicals agree in seeing the Spirit as one who bridges Scripture to the present time, "but in its more radical forms, Pentecostals insist that the revelatory work of the Spirit manifest in and through the apostolic experience remains ongoing today, and in that sense there is the possibility of new truths that the Spirit will unfold through new experiences and in different times and places (even if some might then draw back in saying such new truth will neither contradict nor be inconsistent with what the Bible says)". Even when this radical belief would be marginal in the Costa Rican context, the driving force behind it would be true for Costa Rican Pentecostals even when most would identify with the belief in a Spirit who never contradicts the Bible. See, Nimi Wariboko and Amos Yong, *Paul Tillich and Pentecostal Theology: Spiritual Presence and Spiritual Power,* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2015), 8.
[34] Ibid., 8.

Spirit in church and world."[35] This conception of the world gives Pentecostalism a distinctively playful character[36] with a tremendous capacity for adaptation and resilience.

Being informed by Hannah Arendt's political philosophy, Nimi Wariboko affirms, "the event of Pentecost is an affirmation of the miraculous nature of human action, that capacity to begin something new, the articulation of *natality*."[37] He talks about five natalities: 1) spiritual natality, a conversion experience; 2) factual natality, a daily crucifixion and renewal; 3) political natality, moving beyond the beginning of someone to the beginning of something by the gifts and empowerment of the Spirit; 4) *philos*-natality, a birth to friendship with God and others even to the point of erasing color and class divides as seen in the Azusa Street revival and Pentecost itself; and 5) temporal natality, a break with the world's automatism into a renewed sense of reality and new rhythms of existence. These natalities illustrate the multiform impact of Christ in the life of the believer through the Spirit, constantly remaking and renewing oneself according to God's will.

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[35] James K.A. Smith, *Thinking in Tongues: Pentecostal Contributions to Christian Philosophy* (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2010), 12.

[36] According to Suurmond it is precisely this playful character what differentiates Pentecostal liturgy from mainline and Catholic church services. See Jean-Jacques Suurmond, *Word and Spirit at Play* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1994), 220.

[37] Nimi Wariboko, *The Pentecostal Principle: Ethical Methodology in New Spirit* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2012), 20. See also his section on *"Natality and Pentecostalism"*, 134-141.

When the Pentecostal imagination runs into unforeseen events, it assumes a listening posture to the move of the Holy Spirit with a playful and sensitive heart. Pentecostals wholeheartedly believe God is constantly making things happen.

2.2. Deconstruction happens from inside

"Deconstruction is something which happens

and which happens from inside"[38]

- J. Derrida -

Deconstruction happens from within; this can be seen in two senses. First, as we will see later, there is already a deconstructive element present within ideas. For example, dominating binaries (like male or white), *define themselves* by what *they are not* (female or black). Watkin explains, "deconstruction, then, is what happens: things deconstruct or, better, things exist deconstructively."[39] Consequently, it is said that deconstruction happens in the middle voice; things deconstruct. For this reason, Derrida asserts deconstruction is not neutral; it directly intervenes because it is already inside.[40]

This leads to the second sense in which it can be said that deconstruction happens from inside. The modern ideal pretends to analyze things from the outside by

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[38] Caputo, *Deconstruction in a Nutshell*, 9.
[39] Christopher Watkin, *Great Thinkers: Jacques Derrida* (Phillipsburg, New Jersey: P&R Publishing Company, 2017), 23.
[40] See Derrida, *Positions*, 93.

using external methodologies, but deconstruction does not happen from an objective vantage point, unpolluted by the object of study. Deconstruction celebrates subjectivity, the complete immersion within the world we try to understand. It is important to clarify that the understanding of subjectivity in postmodern thought does not allow for the modernist conceptions of radical individualism. It is not up to the individual to simply decide what is true because she is irremediably immersed within the intricate matrices of meaning. Downing clarifies this position: "humans are not autonomous subjects entirely in control of their perception . . . subjectivity for the postmodernist, then, is not individualistic; it is corporate, reflecting a community's model of truth . . . our subjectivity operates in response to objective truths, but our knowledge of those truths is always implicated by the models that shape our subject positions."[41]

2.2.1. Costa Rican Context: Memory

Postmodern thought reminds us of the importance of location. We are forever immersed in particular contexts that shape how we experience the world and understand the meaning of things. We are deeply shaped by our history and memories.

"You are your memories,"[42] said Nobel Prize winner Eric Kandel when interviewed by co-founder of Omaze, Ryan Cummins. Kandel's groundbreaking studies of memory are motivated by his earliest, most painful memories: fleeing Vienna,

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[41] Crystal L. Downing, *How Postmodernism Serves (My) Faith: Questioning Truth in Language, Philosophy and Art* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2006), 139-140.

[42] Ryan Cummings, "You Are Your Memories," filmed November 4, 2016 at TEDx Hollywood. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s--bdwJ60Ks

Austria, as a child, in order to escape the Nazi invasion. Kandel found that our regular experiences are assigned to short term memories where they are quickly forgotten, yet those highly sensitized experiences (e.g., painful or highly rewarding) go to our brain's long-term memories. These memories and what we learn from them, end up defining who we are.

For Fritz Kling, painful memories can also be experienced on a collective level; according to him, "Postcolonialism is the world's most common form of memory."[43] Colonialism works in the symbolic world of oppressed peoples by forcing the empire's symbols to the cultural center as the norm, the moral, the rational; while the colonies' belief systems are relegated to the periphery and regarded as weak, inferior, and superstitious.

Europe itself was once at the margin. When Dussel, addresses the two hegemonic inversions whose effects have distorted the history of Christianity, the first one he identifies is the reversal of a marginal messianic community of Christians to the imperial religion; the second inversion is the geopolitical shift caused by Europe's coming to America. This caused a shift from an interregional system that used to gravitate around "west of China . . . Hindustan and the Islamic world" to a "world system" in which the once peripheral Western Europe now occupied the center. Now,

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[43] Fritz Kling, *The Meeting of the Waters: 7 Global Currents That Will Propel the Future Church* (Colorado Springs, CO: David C. Cook, 2010), 177.

the newly appointed center of the world rejected the "peripheric" American cultures as inferior.[44]

The impossibility of differentiating between the violence of colonization from the violence of evangelization is exemplified by the use Christian baptism was given in some instances according to historian Moacir de Castro Maia, who says Christian baptism was instrumentalized in the making of a new slave. When Africans were forcefully brought to America this sacrament would be used as symbol of thorough de-socialization.[45] No wonder why colonialism is called "the dark side of modernity."[46] There is no denying Christianity was manipulated as an instrument of oppression in many instances; yet, a great number of Latin Americans have assumed the Christian faith and made it a core part of their identity.

But, again, we must be aware of our memories. Kling continues to say, "the ingrained cultural norms that persist after colonial rule can include servility, complacency, distrust, resentment, and most of all, dependency . . . memory, by definition, lingers."[47] While sentiments of distrust and resentment of Latin Americans towards the Vatican or evangelical Christianity from the United States are probably

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[44] Enrique Dussel, 'The Epistemological Decolonization of Theology,' *Concilium 2013/2 Postcolonial Theology*, (2013), 23

[45] Raimundo C. Barreto, "Decoloniality and Interculturality in World Christianity: A Latin American Perspective." In *World Christianity: Methodological Considerations*, ed. by Martha Frederiks and Dorottya Nagy (Brill, 2021), 77- 78.

[46] Elsa Tamez, "Lectura Latinoamericana Y caribeña De La Biblia Y Lectura Postcolonial De La Biblia: Una comparación crítica." *Revista Bíblica* 82, 1-2 (2020), 170.

[47] Fritz Kling, *The Meeting of the Waters: 7 Global Currents That Will Propel the Future Church* (Colorado Springs, CO: David C. Cook, 2010), 177-178.

more present among the non-believers, servility, complacency, and dependency towards evangelical Christianity from the United States can definitely be found among Latin American Pentecostals. From Londoño's perspective Christianity in Latin America "ends up benefiting the white, the European or North American, and their missionary armies."[48] This may be the case in *some* circumstances, but it is my perception that the biggest challenge right now is how many believers mirror theologies and practices that have a strong North American taste, uncritically assuming that these churches from the North know better. Even though Costa Rica has been independent since 1821, some colonial attitudes seem to persist, which is why many prefer to see postcolonialism more as *de-colonialism*, an ongoing process of reaffirming a people's identity.

Postcolonial readings of the Bible acknowledge that the idea of an impartial and objective author or reader is merely a construction.[49] Postcolonialism does not wait passively for intercultural exchanges to transform realities but unapologetically deconstructs any ideas of cultural superiority that have distorted history. Postcolonialism affirms the polycentric reality of World Christianity; it makes room "for creative reconstructions and reinventions of, among other things, Latin American religious identities,"[50] and allows the possibility of a more authentic mutual learning.

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[48] Juan Esteban Londoño, "Hermenéuticas Postcoloniales," *Alternativas Revista de Análisis y Reflexión Teológica*. Año 22- No. 49 (Enero-Junio 2016), 3-4.
[49] Tamez, "Lectura Latinoamericana Y caribeña De La Biblia Y Lectura Postcolonial De La Biblia," 171.
[50] Barreto, "Decoloniality and Interculturality in World Christianity," 83.

Empowerment is key for critically addressing foreign ideas. Escobar highlights the usefulness of *contextualization* in the face of the Latin American reality, "[contextualization] may also be understood in a more general way as a movement that seeks to affirm local cultures in their search for autonomy and full expression, as a reactive process in contrast to globalization . . . Bible translation in the vernacular has been a decisive factor in the strengthening of a sense of identity and dignity of peoples and nations, thus preparing them to struggle against colonialism."[51] In the same way that Bible translation was a key factor in helping Latin Americans appropriate their faith by allowing them to own and reshape what once was a mere imposition, I think theological education can further the process of empowerment that started with access to the biblical texts by leveling the power differentials between local faith communities and foreign voices.

Yet, theological education is not the forte of the Costa Rican Pentecostal church. Misconceptions about education as a hindrance to the direction of the Holy Spirit have led many leaders to favor secular theological education (which obviously helps to some point) over theological education. The Costa Rican Pentecostal movement that started a bold expansion in the 70's and 80's recruited young people who would devote their lives to ministry with an eschatological urge to evangelize before the imminent return of

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[51] Samuel Escobar, *The New Global Mission: The Gospel from Everywhere to Everywhere* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 61-62.

Christ. This urgent need for evangelization led to tremendous numerical growth but left no place for furthering the minimum theological preparation many of these leaders received. It is understandable that past generations of Costa Rican Pentecostal leaders lacked the theological tools necessary for a robust theological exchange, consequently *importing* tendencies more than *producing* them.

To some degree these dynamics are being repeated in the present regarding the issue of deconstruction of faith. Costa Rican believers and leaders in a globalized world receive the influence of deconstructing movements from the global West and end up either uncritically mirroring them or blindly rejecting them. In my opinion, critical engagement should be our approach, but the empowerment of education is necessary for this to happen.

Latin American theologian Justo González provides a good picture of what critical engagement should look like. González sees the expansion of the church in Acts as a series of conversions using the paradigm of frontiers versus borders. Frontiers are unidirectional and impermeable, the result of mythologies such as Manifest Destiny that assume a conquering posture. Borders, on the other hand, are bidirectional places of encounter; their permeability allows for mutual transformation and growth. True borders lead to *mestizaje*,[52] a truly intimate encounter. For González, the church in Acts

[52] A term that started being used in a pejorative sense to describe the offspring born of Spanish and native relationships.

expands by setting borders, constantly learning from new contexts, leading to different conversions of the church along the way. The mission of the church is expanded by *mestizaje*.[53] This is the kind of mutual exchange that needs to happen in the immediate future of Christianity between Costa Rican and Western theologies, one that allows a natural movement from philosophical conversations to lived ecclesiologies.

Memories help us understand ourselves, allowing us to better relate to others and to find new ways into the future. The Costa Rican Pentecostal Christian church should understand itself as being located within a context of well-educated and connected people who possess a strong democratic mindset[54] that allows for the possibility of robust dialogue. Its Pentecostalism is full of vitality; it carries the seeds of the promise of being raised by the Spirit as dreamers and prophets. Its Christianity connects the church's identity to a long history of disciples and traditions that have much to teach a church in the midst of a postmodern reality.

2.2.2. Peter in Cornelius's House: The Inside of What Happens

The only way Peter can relate in a new way to the Gentiles is from his location as a Jew. He is not able to objectively analyze the situation, so God finds him amid his core identity through an experience in the middle voice (ἐγένετο ἐπ᾽ αὐτὸν ἔκστασις v. 10),

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[53] Justo L. González, *Santa Biblia: The Bible Through Hispanic Eyes* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1996), 86-87.

[54] Costa Rica is recognized as one of the strongest democracies in Latin America. This profound democratic tradition shapes the Costa Rican understanding of and relationship to authority.

precisely the way deconstruction is supposed to *happen*. By showing Peter the unexpected, God was revealing the matrices of meaning the apostle was dealing with; a seed was being planted that would not bear fruit until later.

God insists three times (as he usually dealt with the apostle) while Peter clung tight to the dietary laws. William Willimon grasps the significance of these matrices of meaning from the minority's point of view, "[they are] people for whom a bit of pork or a pinch of incense or a little intermarriage was a matter of life and death for the community . . . a matter of survival and identity for Jews . . . can it be that these laws are being supplanted by some other basis for survival and identity?"[55] This insight is very significant: laws, structures, traditions can have more weight to minorities because these represent a safeguard for an endangered identity. The danger for Christians is when faith communities place more importance on methods and customs than they do on their identity as disciples of Christ. This distinction is many times invisible, until the Spirit invites us into experiences that reframe our hearts. Peter's memory probably triggered sentiments of distrust and resentment towards Gentiles; after all, the impure beasts shown to him represented how he perceived Gentiles. The great miracle in this story is that those at the center and those at the margins find a place of mutual learning and growth.

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[55] William H. Willimon, *Acts: Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2010), 95.

The lingering effect of memory as mentioned by Kling and the patience God showed in dealing with the apostle three times show us to be sensitive to other people's beliefs and traditions, even if these need to be challenged. Important change takes times but also requires a steady effort. Like in the case of Peter, God finds us where we are to take us where he wants us to be. Our faith in the incarnated Christ reminds us God finds no problem with the gift of subjectivity. He walks with us in the midst of our human experience.

2.2.3. Latin American Pentecostal Perspective: The Embodied Experience of the Spirit

Downing addresses the subjectivity of human experience and the multiple matrices of meaning by calling them "constructive towers of knowledge."[56] We do not come to these towers; we are born into them. The different values that guide our interaction with the world are written in the walls of these towers (e.g. "share your toys," "men do this, not that;" "these kind of people are not trustworthy," "God expects…") and no matter how hard we try we are always surrounded by different

[56] Downing, *How Postmodernism Serves (My) Faith*, 155-178. The author clarifies she did not specify a tower of religion because religion functions in different ways depending on each person; for some people religious affiliation is a matter of class while for others it is a matter of ethnicity. Yet, she does recognize the important role of religion within the towers of knowledge. From a Catholic perspective, for example, Protestants raised the tower of the infallibility of the Bible in exchange for the belief in a Spirit-inspired Pope. When this concept is combined with the belief in the "priesthood of all believers" a multiplicity of biblical interpretations arise that contribute to postmodern relativism and the further division of the church (the multiple towers of Lutherans, Episcopalians, Pentecostals, and many others).

towers. The multiple towers around us determine in many ways our responsiveness to God, but also point us to the sovereignty of a God who placed us there when we were born.

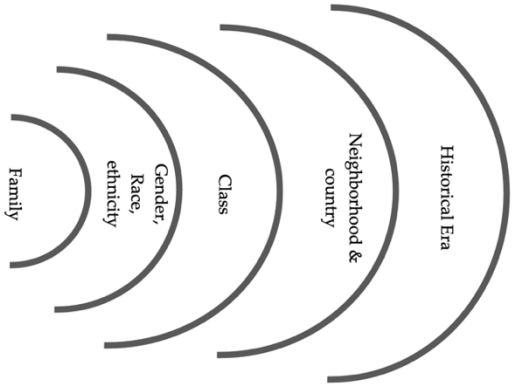

Figure 1 Downing's Towers of Knowledge

Downing continues to explain we may not fully escape the influence of these towers, but through *agency* we can rewrite in important ways the discourse of said towers. This is especially important for people on the margins who many times live in the intersection of two or more towers, which is Downing's description of the postcolonial experience. She also makes the important remark that God not only places us within determined human-made towers that define our experience but he also transcends said towers. In consequence, transcending human-made towers would make God unconditioned by these constructions. God can find us where we are and helps us change what needs to be rewritten. From this perspective, the location of a person within her or his towers of meaning is something to be honored as part of God's sovereignty, even if it sometimes requires to be challenged, as any human construction

needs to be; this also means humans can be empowered by God to rewrite unjust, sinful, or erred messages within their surrounding towers. Pentecostalism is well equipped to deal with the reality from this viewpoint in at least three ways.

First, Pentecostalism is an embodied experience that finds a person's location as something that should be both honored and challenged. It traces its identity back to the events described in Acts 2, which represent a highly subjective but deeply communal experience. Tongues of fire rested on them enabling each one to speak as the Spirit willed, but far from isolating them in individualistic mystical experiences, the Spirit united them as a community of faith, assigning each one an important role in the body of believers by enabling them to communicate in different languages through *xenolalia*.[57] Such enabling not only brought the community of disciples together, but it also connected them to the multiple experiences of those from other towers of knowledge: Parthians, Medes, Phrygians, and many others.

The Pentecost experience honors the location of each individual while also challenging them to rewrite the walls of their towers through a call to faith and repentance, while bonding them into a community of faith. Tillich identifies that "in the story of Pentecost, the Spirit of Christ shows its creativity in both directions, the individual and the universal."[58] Wariboko resonates with this posture, "Pentecostalism

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[57] Even *glossolalia* in the community of faith is meant to connect us to others through interpretation, as seen in 1 Corinthians.

[58] Paul Tillich, *Shaking of the Foundations* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1948), 138.

renders all distinctions, divisional markings, and classes inoperative without abolishing them and 'without ever reaching any final ground,' engendering a tension within every identity itself."[59]

The ultimate sign of a person's location is one's own body, that which allows us to inhabit space and time, placing us firmly within different towers of meaning. Pentecostalism unapologetically affirms embodiment and materiality. The Pentecostal value of the supernatural finds very material manifestations. Pentecostal preaching itself is the preamble to embodied experiences in the Spirit such as prayer for divine healing, "deliverance and liberation, then, are not just 'spiritual'. . . implicit in this affirmation of bodily healing is a broader affirmation, namely, a sense that the full gospel values the *whole* person."[60] Smith even expands to explain the affinity Pentecostalism has found with the so called prosperity gospel, "the prosperity gospel (for all its failures) might be an unwitting testimony to the holism of Pentecostal spirituality. . . [such testimony is] one of the most un-Gnostic moments of Pentecostal spirituality that refuses to spiritualize the promise that the gospel is 'good news for the poor.' "[61] Without a doubt this is one of the reasons Pentecostalism (with a clear bent towards prosperity) has found open arms in believing communities throughout Latin America.

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[59] Wariboko, *The Pentecostal Principle*, 143.
[60] Smith, *Thinking in Tongues*, 42. Smith rightly recognizes the fact that Pentecostalism has uncritically adopted fundamentalist dualisms, yet, as shown, said dualisms do not harmonize with the Pentecostal worldview. This, in my opinion, is one of the lingering effects of a colonial memory in Latin American Pentecostalism that simply imports ideas without critical engagement out of a sense of inferiority.
[61] Ibid., 43.

Second, Pentecostalism empowers those on the margins. Pentecostals boldly appropriate Christ's promise "but you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you" (Acts 1.8), a verse as famous as John 3.16 within Latin American Pentecostal communities. Albrecht and Howard explain, "immediately prior to the Pentecostal revivals, Christians were eagerly seeking the power of God: power for abundant living, power for victory over sin, power for effective witness to the world. In the experience of the baptism in the Spirit, Pentecostals found that power."[62] Even if there is no access to medical attention, there is access to the healing power of God; even if there is an imminent physical threat, there is power over every force that seeks to harm, oppress, or destroy; even if there is human suffering, there is power to flourish and prosper, all through the Spirit's empowerment.

Third, the Pentecostal experience values and even expects emotional responses. This is an important postmodern posture because modernity disdained the highly subjective aspect of emotional reactions while favoring supposedly objective rational responses. The modern myth that was supposed to lead humans to better engagement with the surrounding world backfired by disconnecting us from realities; as Smith notes, "emotions are not just reflexive responses or the 'irrational' detritus of experience. Emotions are themselves 'takes' on the world."[63] Furthermore, "brain lesion studies have

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[62] Albrecht and Howard, "Pentecostal Spirituality," 243.
[63] Smith, *Thinking in Tongues*, 78.

demonstrated that damage to the emotion-processing center of the brain impedes real-life rationality and decision-making."[64] We could say that in order to be rational, one needs to be emotional.

This is especially valuable in a context that suppresses the expression of emotions like Latin American chauvinist societies, where the display of certain emotions is rendered incompatible with the male-female binary (more on binaries in the next section) and is only acceptable if the male is intoxicated with alcohol. Pentecostalism deconstructs this binary by providing a context in which men sing, shout, dance, and cry in the presence of God, something which is celebrated by the whole community.

All these factors bring the community together as part of the story of God's continual action through the presence of the Spirit, providing individuals not only a sense of agency, but shared purpose; "[offering a] narratival location– situating the believing community within a story that provides a new context for understanding their experience."[65] This is salvation as embodied transformation.[66]

On a global scale, a Latin American Pentecostalism that furthers its agency through an empowering theological education that provides the tools for critical theological analysis, instead of simple repetition of denominational dogmas or apologetic formulas, will be uniquely positioned to contribute to a grand theological

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[64] Joel B. Green, *Body, Soul, and Human Life: The Nature of Humanity in the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2008), 121.
[65] Smith, *Thinking in Tongues,* 69.
[66] See Green, *Body, Soul, and Human Life*, 137-139.

conversation; especially if it rediscovers its Christian roots which transcend Azusa and reach all the way back to Catholic orthodoxy.

On the local scale, Latin American Pentecostalism is more than capable in engaging subjective deconstructive experiences because of the way it embraces and celebrates the subjectivity of the human being in all its uniqueness while firmly planting the human experience within a community of meaning that points to the objective realities of God.

2.3. Deconstruction is not a method

"Deconstruction is not a method or some tool that you apply something from the outside."[67]

-J. Derrida-

Even when it is tempting to try to reduce deconstruction to a set of steps or methodologies, deconstruction philosophers are very insistent in asserting that deconstruction is not a method. Methods are applied by modern thinkers who use the same set of tools to any given object, under the illusion of being independent and objective observers of phenomena; postmodernism does not claim objectivity and is suspicious of recipe-like approaches that apply the same set of steps independently of

[67] Caputo, *Deconstruction in a Nutshell*, 9.

what they are analyzing. Watkin explains, "deconstruction is not a method or a set of procedures that one can pull off the shelf and set to work on any unsuspecting text. . . a method brings the same set of tools to everything it encounters. . . it exploits the text for its own purposes, rather than trying to understand the text in its own terms."[68] To say there is such a thing like a deconstructive reading of a text is to treat deconstruction dangerously close to a method. This can be seen in how Derrida tried to be sensible to each specific text by using different terms for what he was doing. Watkin enumerates some of Derrida's terms: deconstruction, différance, supplementarity, dissemination, trace, pharmakon, hymen, and iterability.

Perhaps it is Caputo who provides the clearest answer of what exactly is deconstruction by accurately describing it as *a style of thinking*.[69] This means deconstruction is more of an attitude by which we relate to a text, trying to find how authors think. This style of thinking is decidedly inclined towards finding "the tensions, the contradictions, the heterogeneity within [the authors'] own corpus;"[70] and is interested in decentering as a way of opening up to the other. Caputo summarizes the deconstructive attitude by stating, "whenever it runs up against a limit, deconstruction presses against it . . . . Deconstruction is the relentless pursuit of the impossible."[71]

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[68] Watkin, *Jacques Derrida*, 21.
[69] Caputo, *The Folly of God*, 21.
[70] Caputo, *Deconstruction in a Nutshell*, 9.
[71] Ibid., 32.

What exactly are these limits deconstruction presses against? Some of the great limits in Western culture are imposed by the "tyranny of binaries," which is a way in which Western metaphysics has structured knowledge while trying to differentiate and explain concepts. For example: big/small, soul/body, male/female, white/black, reason/belief, natural/artificial, heterosexual/homosexual (or any other form of sexuality other than heterosexual), objective/subjective. Even when Derrida recognizes these oppositions might be helpful, he finds two problems with binaries:[72]

1. Hierarchies

Concepts are not just differentiated, they are hierarchized. This leads to the exploitation and oppression of the lesser term. As Downing explains, "in the history of Western culture, most of the top terms were perceived as central to being fully human."[73] Think, for example, about the hierarchized binary male/female; women have suffered from different forms of oppression because they have been assigned the lower status in the binary. Then, the term on top is always preferrable; it is easier for a girl to "act as a boy" than for a boy to "act as a girl." Society in fact instrumentalizes language in order to perpetuate this dynamic.

It is important to understand that Derrida never intends to simply reverse hierarchies. This revenge strategy would only perpetuate a flawed system by

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[72] See Watkin, *Jacques Derrida*, 12-13.
[73] Downing, *How Postmodernism Serves (My) Faith*, 130.

rearranging the factors without altering the result. Deconstruction is after the hierarchical structure itself, calling it into question because such a structure has been constructed somehow. According to Derrida, these structures of meaning are formed by "forces that are linguistic, historical, social, political, gendered, bodily. . . Together these forces make up so many matrices–which in the shorthand notation proposed by Derrida is famously called *différance*–which produce relatively stable effects or unities of meaning."[74] Being relatively stable means these units of meaning are also relatively unstable and thus deconstructible. The meaning we assign something is just a freeze frame in time, showing how the forces in the matrices interact at a certain point in history.

2. Traces

The Western notion of binaries relies on a concept of ideal of purity as if one term could exist without the other, while in reality the privileged term is defined in relation to the underprivileged one; e.g., male is that which is not female. Therefore "the dominant term on top gets its meaning by the lower term it rejects. Thus the top term contains a 'trace' of what is not itself."[75] This means the deconstruction of one term is always present from within (deconstruction happens inside). Deconstruction is just exposing that which is already there, creating new ways by destabilizing the categorical

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[74] Caputo, *The Folly of God*, 24.
[75] Downing, *How Postmodernism Serves (My) Faith*, 131.

oppositions without simply getting rid of binaries.[76] This means deconstruction deals with tensions; it is located in the distance between two opposing ideas. Such distance is conceived as the infinite amount of numbers between zero and one where there is a limitless play of traces; this is called *différance*.[77]

These traces are not restricted to language. The contribution of deconstruction as a style of thinking is to be applied to all areas of human endeavor because one is always located "within a play of differences,"[78] in the midst of *différance.* So, wherever deconstruction finds a dominating binary term, it seeks to remove it from the top of the hierarchy, from the center it has been given; deconstruction is a decentering force that finds new ways.

But then, does deconstruction reject all methodologies and leave us with no tools to engage the world around us? Westphal clarifies that both Derrida and Ricoeur would agree in the importance of methods. Such tools offer necessary guardrails against "anything goes" attitudes,[79] which means that not every perspective or opinion is valid. The problem deconstruction addresses is the modernist blind faith placed in methodologies as deliverers of god-like objectivity.

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[76] Watkin, *Jacques Derrida*, 43.
[77] see Caputo, *Deconstruction in a Nutshell*, 105, 183-184.
[78] Ibid., 104.
[79] Merold Westphal, *Whose Community? Which Interpretation? (the Church and Postmodern Culture): Philosophical Hermeneutics for the Church* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009), 68.

2.3.1. Costa Rican Context: The Methods of Fundamentalism

As the Protestant movement developed in Costa Rica and Cold War tensions grew worldwide, big ministries from the United States invested heavily in the Central American region. Hastings notes that ministries such as those of Jimmy Swaggart and Pat Robertson proclaimed "a highly anti-Communist and anti-Catholic Gospel of biblical fundamentalism and prosperity"[80] in places like Guatemala. These ministries were also present in Costa Rica during the 80's.

The anti-Communist factor meant a close alignment to Christianity as understood in the United States by fundamentalist-right wing Christians, while the anti-Catholicism of these ministries fanned the flames of a painful history of religious intolerance in Costa Rica, leading to evangelical movements defining themselves further against Catholicism.

Hastings also notes the influence of biblical fundamentalism. This emerged from the liberal-conservative controversy that took place within North American Protestant evangelicalism in the first decades of 1900´s when a significant group of religious leaders was deeply concerned with the effect modernity exerted over the Christian faith. For history professor Matthew Avery Sutton, fundamentalists ironically used as much modernist thought and practice as the liberals; in a New York Times piece he describes how "they treated it [the Bible] like an engineering manual. They saw individual verses

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[80] Hastings, *A World History of Christianity*, 365.

as pieces of data . . . . Unlike actual religious conservatives, they had no sense of tradition or community . . . . Fundamentalists were highly individualistic and eager to use the latest technology . . . . they had no time for incremental change, or for reasoning with those who differed with them . . . . Jesus was coming soon."[81] Fundamentalists enunciated the irreducible minimum beliefs a person must have in order to be a considered a Christian: "verbal inspiration and absolute inerrancy of the Scripture, the virgin birth, blood atonement, the bodily resurrection of Christ, the miracle-working power of Christ and the open rejection of the historical-critical method in biblical exegesis."[82] Fundamentalism laid little emphasis on Christian praxis while focusing on "cognitive adherence to 'correct faith' formulation";[83] this produced a sectarian mindset.

Witherup addresses fundamentalism from the perspective of Catholic Biblical interpretation; he defines it as, "a loose Protestant movement opposed to modernity and committed to preserving the 'literal' truth of the Bible."[84] However, he identifies positions in the Catholic church that were essentially fundamentalist prior to the twentieth century (e.g., Pope Leo XIII's *Providentissimus Deus*, which can be seen as a defense of verbal inerrancy). Fundamentalism persists in some Catholic circles because

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[81] Matthew Avery Sutton, "The Day Christian Fundamentalism Was Born: How a Meeting in Philadelphia Changed American Religion Forever," *The New York Times,* May 25, 2019.
[82] Amzie Yoder, "Fundamentalism and the Church in Central America." *Mission Focus*, Annual Review, 1994, vol. 2. Elkhart, IN: U.S.A., 45.
[83] Ibid., 46.
[84] Ronald D. Witherup, "*The Interpretation of the Bible in the Roman Catholic Church and the Orthodox Churches,*" in *Scripture: An Ecumenical Introduction to the Bible and Its Interpretation*, ed. Michael J. Gorman (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2010), 202.

of its appeal as a form of preserving basic biblical values, even when "it is the only approach to biblical interpretation that is singled out officially as incompatible with a Catholic approach."[85] The 1993 Pontifical Biblical Commission states:

> The fundamentalist approach is dangerous, for it is attractive to people who look to the Bible for ready answers to the problems of life. It can deceive this people, offering them interpretations that are pious but illusory . . . fundamentalism actually invites people to a kind of intellectual suicide . . . it unwittingly confuses the divine substance of the biblical message with what are in fact its human limitations.[86]

Gorman classifies Protestantism in three broad groups: fundamentalist, evangelicals, and mainline. In order to facilitate analysis, I summarized his insights in the following table.

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[85] Witherup, "*The Interpretation of the Bible in the Roman Catholic Church and the Orthodox Churches*," 203.
[86] Pontifical Biblical Commission, "Interpretation of the Bible in the Church," §I.F., 1993. https://www.catholic-resources.org/ChurchDocs/PBC_Interp-FullText.htm

Table 1: Branches of Protestantism, by Gorman. [87]

Branch	*Biblical Interpretation*	*Theological, social, and political agendas*	*Cooperation with other movements*
Mainline	General acceptance of biblical criticism	Moderate to liberal	Ecumenical dialogue and cooperation with ideologically similar churches, as well as Roman Catholicism and Orthodoxy
Evangelical	Gradual and cautious acceptance of biblical criticism	Moderate to conservative	Interdenominational cooperation with ideologically similar traditions. Recently with traditionally Roman Catholics and Orthodox.
Fundamentalist	General rejection of biblical criticism and adherence to theory of Bible's verbal inerrancy	Very conservative in reaction to modernity and perceived liberalism from other churches (often deemed nonchurches)	Separatists. Cooperation requires agreements with "fundamentals"

Classifications such as these can be very useful for the sake of clarity but, as it usually happens, we run the risk of oversimplifying complex issues, which is why Gorman clarifies there is a significant overlap among these branches. Most of the Costa Rican Protestant churches move somewhere between Evangelicalism and Fundamentalism, to the point that it is common to hear some critics (and religious leaders) use both terms effectively as synonyms. The overlay of the different tendencies

[87] Michael J. Gorman, "The Interpretation of the Bible in Protestant Churches," in *Scripture: An Ecumenical Introduction to the Bible and Its Interpretation*, ed. Michael J. Gorman (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2010), 178.

intensifies or diminishes depending on the political and social climate or the influence certain ministries exert on different moments and places.

The last element in Hasting's analysis is 'prosperity,' an ideal that resonated deeply within the Latin American experience. This message was characterized by an over-emphasis on the blessing of God over those who faithfully give, and produced leaders whose success was measured by market-like results and strategies.[88]

In 1986 the Assemblies of God developed a project sponsored by Jimmy Swaggart ministries in which an urban church would be planted in the heart of San Jose, Costa Rica by a young Costa Rican pastoral couple; this gave birth to *Iglesia Centro Evangelístico* in Zapote, the church in which I grew up as the pastor´s kid, and in which my wife and I now serve as pastors. *Centro Evangelístico* church grew steadily over the years and became one of Costa Rica´s first megachurches. Despite the resistance of other faith traditions (including other branches of Protestantism), Pentecostal churches are the ones that have experienced the most growth since the 60´s in terms of number of churches planted, missions opened, and membership.[89]

An article by Universidad de Costa Rica's paper, *Semanario Universidad*, presented a study which compares data from 2019 and 2021. In such a short period of time some interesting changes happened concerning the Costa Rican religious

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[88] Yoder, "Fundamentalism and the Church in Central America," 48.
[89] Holland, *Historia de la Iglesia Evangélica Costarricense*, 26.

landscape. According to the article non-believers are on the rise; in just a year and half the number went from 19,9% to 27%. There also seems to be a slight reduction of Evangelicals which moved from 21,6% to 19,8%, but the difference is within the study's margin of error; meanwhile, Catholicism reached a historical new low: 47,5%.[90]

In my opinion, the fact that these changes happened during the pandemic does not follow that the changes happened because of the pandemic; nevertheless, one cannot rule out the possibility that the world-wide COVID crisis was a catalytic factor for tendencies present long before. Writing back in 2015 for a theological and socioreligious Costa Rican journal, Dr. Laura Fuentes Belgrave identified a trend that had already been going on for a while: Costa Rican nonpracticing Catholics were–and still are–on the rise.[91] Fuentes Belgrave anticipated a generational change in which Evangelical Christians and non-believers would revoke Catholic dominion of the religious field. In fact, the two main causes for Costa Ricans to become Evangelical believers are either conversion or family lineage, in that order. The fact that family heritage is becoming such a significant factor in Evangelical growth shows Evangelical faith is emerging as an integrator for the national community on par with Catholicism.[92] It is important to note

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[90] Álvaro Murillo, "Encuesta CIEP-UCR Evidencia una Costa Rica Estatista y Menos Religiosa," *Semanario Universidad*, July 7, 2021. https://semanariouniversidad.com/pais/encuesta-ciep-ucr-evidencia-a-una-costa-rica-estatista-y-menos-religiosa/

[91] Laura Fuentes Belgrave, "Cambios en las Creencias Religiosas en Costa Rica," *SIWÔ*, 9, no.1 (2015): 54.

[92] Ibid., 56-59.

that more than 60% of the Costa Rican Evangelical movement is comprised by Pentecostal Christians.[93]

Catholicism has had more success among the college educated than Evangelicalism. Most Catholics, either practicing or non-practicing, have college level education; while most practicing Evangelicals have not finished high school and the more educated Evangelicals tend to be the non-practicing ones. At this point it is important to clarify Costa Rica has a 97.9% literacy rate among its general population and a 99.4% among the youth population; in both cases female literacy rate is 0.1% higher. [94] This makes Costa Rica's overall population a fairly educated one. Among both Catholics and Evangelicals, the least practicing Christians are the younger ones.[95]

What lies on the other side of conservative Christianity? According to Marcus Borg on the opposite side of conservative Christianity we find progressive Christianity (he would locate most non-practicing Christians in between both extremes). Most progressives can be found in mainline churches or living their religious lives independently from church. He recognizes progressives are known more for what they do not believe (biblical inerrancy, literal interpretation, Jesus dead paid for human sin, and that Christianity is the exclusive way of salvation) than for what they actually

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[93] Clifton L. Holland, *Un Análsis de la Obra Evangélica de Costa Rica en 2013-2014 en Perspectiva Histórica*, Programa Latinoamericano de Estudios Sociorreligiosos PROLADES, December 31, 2014, San Pedro, Costa Rica, 11.

[94] "Costa Rica," UNESCO, 2018 https://en.unesco.org/countries/costa-rica

[95] Fuentes Belgrave, "Cambios en las Creencias Religiosas en Costa Rica," 55.

affirm; therefore, Borg clarifies these affirmations: 1) The Bible is sacred scripture to be interpreted historically and metaphorically, 2) salvation is primarily about transformation in this life, 3) the human predicament is that we find ourselves blind, diseased, and dead, living in the bondage of Egypt and the disconnection of exile; 4) Christ is not payment for human sin, Jesus, as the center of Christianity, reveals God's character and passion; 5) believing as understood in modern Christianity is merely an assertion of statements, while believing as understood in earlier Christianity was more about beloving, which has transformative power; and 6) Christianity is about a path of transformation, though this does not mean it is the only way to it.[96] Even when many conservative Christians might feel comfortable affirming most of these statements, in practice both conservative and progressives arrive to very different conclusions regarding issues like sexuality and cultural affirmation of Christian faith.

Churches that are constructed around the logic of binaries such as evangelical/catholic, capitalism/socialism, male/female (referring to ministry opportunities), pro-life/pro-choice, conservative/progressive will result in places of exclusion not just for those in the opposite extreme of the binary, but also for the many located in-between the extremes. Unlike the United States, mainline churches have not grown as much in Costa Rica; when summed up Lutherans, Presbyterians, and

[96] Marcus J. Borg, *Convictions: How I Learned What Matters Most* (New York, NY: Harper One, 2014), 14-16.

Anglicans represent only 2.1% of all churches in the country.[97] This means that believers who don't agree with conservative Christianity have limited options: being effectively left out of congregational life, keeping silence in their Evangelical congregations, or planting new congregations by themselves. But if the Costa Rican church learns to deconstruct in a healthy manner, it will also learn how to deal with a plurality of voices in welcoming and constructive ways. Instead of closing down defensively or "watering down beliefs," the church can develop in its engagement with the current context.

2.3.2. Peter in Cornelius's House: The Methodology of the Law

The unsettling vision Peter experienced instinctively awakens his reliance on known methods, "the law says no, therefore I cannot." This is a man who saw Jesus apply the law in the way it was originally intended: for the benefit of the sons and daughters of Abraham; yet his mind could not fathom that God could raise up children of Abraham even out of stones.[98] The grace Christ extended to the Jews could not possibly be extended to the Gentiles in the same way; the Holy Spirit that Christ poured over the sons and daughters of Abraham could not possibly fill the Gentiles in the same way. This belief, this attitude towards his known methodologies is what the vision was uncovering.

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[97] Holland, *Un Análsis de la Obra Evangélica de Costa Rica en 2013-2014 en Perspectiva Histórica*, 12.
[98] Luke 7.8

Commenting on Peter's experience Willimon says, "Faith. . . is our often breathless attempt to keep up with the redemptive activity of God, to keep asking ourselves, 'What is God doing?'. . . the wind has again blown where it wills (John 3.8), and now the church must account for its movements."[99] The Spirit is always moving, and the church should always respond accordingly. Methods are useful guides, but they also provide limiting perspectives. Ultimately the church must decide whether to be faithful to a method or to the moving of the Spirit; each has its place, but they do not share the same authority.

2.3.3. Latin American Pentecostal Perspective: Affective-Narrative Epistemologies, Beyond Methods

Caputo's description of deconstruction as *a way of thinking* is also the perfect description for Pentecostalism; it truly is *a way of thinking*: ever-expecting, ever-attentive to what God the Holy Spirit is doing. Albrecht and Howard identify two Pentecostal sensibilities relevant to this conversation: 1) orientation to experience, a "sensitivity built into the Pentecostal mind and heart;" and 2) attention to the Holy Spirit, leading to "an affective ability to notice the nuances of the Spirit."[100]

Because of these sensibilities, Pentecostals have defied the evangelical tendency of giving preference to the work of the apostle Paul and instead have naturally

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[99] Willimon, *Acts*, 99.
[100] Albrecht & Howard, "Pentecostal Spirituality," 241.

gravitated towards the narrative genres found in the Gospels and Acts.[101] This is one of the reasons Pentecostals have developed what Smith calls "an affective, narrative epistemology"; he explains, "narrative knowledge is found in the connection between narratives and emotions. . . a 'logic' that is not deductive but affective. . . it is emotive. . . the emotions are themselves already 'construals' of the world."[102] Such epistemology explains why testimony is central to Pentecostal spirituality.

Just like Peter who was filled with the Spirit in Acts 2 but was hindered in God's mission by his persistent overreliance on the methods of the law, so has it happened to the Pentecostal church in many places of Latin America, Costa Rica included. A church unquestionably filled with the Spirit of God has relied too much on the methods of fundamentalism and is now being hindered in its pursuit of God's mission. The church that supposedly makes room for the Spirit to lead has mistaken the voice of God for the voice of modernity's fundamentalism.

In *Erring*, Mark C. Taylor mentions how postmodern thinkers revealed that "what for centuries had been regarded as objective reality is, in fact, subjective projection. Inverting the traditional Creator/creature relation, God came to be regarded as the creation of human beings."[103] It is easy to believe that such blame could only be assigned to scientific methods, but in fact, fundamentalism allows the creatures to keep

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[101] Wariboko & Yong, *Paul Tillich and Pentecostal Theology*, 7.
[102] Smith, "Thinking in Tongues," 65.
[103] Mark C. Taylor, *Erring : A Postmodern A/Theology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 4.

the Creator under control, out of Cornelius' house, by the convenient reliance on excluding binaries (to mention one example). Taylor continues to explain that the history of Western religion can be described as a pendular move between "seemingly exclusive and evident opposites";[104] for example:

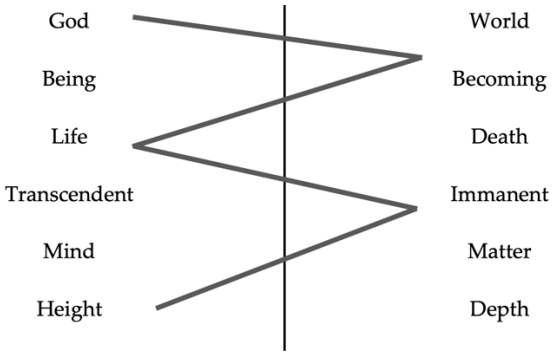

Figure 2 Taylor´s Religious History as Pendular Movement

The ever-present danger of correcting one's path is to simply fall into a pendular movement of extremes. Even more, the pendular movement might be so hard that it thrusts some people outside of the faith to a movement from belief to atheism. This of course is modern language since the concept of atheism as we know it is a modern development; nevertheless, the New Testament testifies there have always been people within the community of faith who have "rejected and so have suffered shipwreck with regard to the faith."[105] Zahnd identifies such movement as demolition rather than

[104] Ibid., 8.
[105] 1 Timothy 1.19

deconstruction; in his experience this happens many times because people remain fundamentalist at their core, meaning they move from Christian fundamentalism to atheistic fundamentalism.[106] Enns talks about "the sin of certainty," which occurs when the need to be right fueled by fear is what guides our life of faith; this leads us to trust more in our mental images of God (which can become idols) than trusting God himself to help us grow in our knowledge and relationship to him. People who assume this posture live a faith marked by stress, anxiety, belligerence, pride, constant monitoring of others; but in the end, is more about fear than faith.[107] When fear fuels a life people can live this way either from within Christian faith or from atheism.

Deconstruction is more about managing tensions than it is about resolving them. Sometimes the Spirit takes us to the house of Cornelius, where tensions abound and methodologies fail, but it is there where we are challenged to abandon our fears and embrace a living faith.

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[106] Zahnd, *When Everything's on Fire*, 26-27.
[107] Peter Enns, *The Sin of Certainty: Why God Desires Our Trust More Than Our 'Correct' Beliefs* (New York, NY: Harper Collins, 2016), 18-19, 204-205.

2.4. Deconstruction is a call

"Justice is what gives us the impulse, the drive, or the movement to improve the law, that is, to deconstruct the law. . . the condition of possibility of deconstruction is a call for justice."[108]

-J. Derrida-

By using the theme of justice, Derrida is explaining an important feature of deconstruction: it is fueled by, and always after, an unconditional. In *Force of Law* he is after the ideal of justice, in *Rogues* he searches for the ideal of democracy, in *Of Hospitality* he pursues the ideal of hospitality, and so on. From his perspective humans give conditioned expressions to unconditional ideals, so the human experience is a continual, never-ending search for that which is unconditioned.

Therefore, "the mark of the human condition is to live *in the distance between the conditional and unconditional*, to constantly negotiate between them."[109] In this sense, deconstruction could be thought of as a circular movement but not one forever entrapped in the same discussions. Deconstruction recognizes there is an undecidability in the midst of *différance* (the overlapping matrices of meaning), but it still responds without vacillation or postponement, fully aware of its imperfect response, always open to growth. Thus, perhaps a more accurate conception of deconstruction would be

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[108] Caputo, *Deconstruction in a Nutshell*, 16.
[109] Caputo, *Hoping Against Hope*, 37.

thinking about it as an upward spiral, always reaching beyond, always working toward shortening the distance between the conditional and the unconditional. Just like we are always running after justice, democracy, or hospitality but still never quite arriving at their full expression, understanding that "no construction can ever be adequate to the undeconstructible and so every construction stands under constant judgement by the undeconstructible."[110] Deconstruction, then, does not seek anarchy but responsibility to the undeconstructible, ever after the calling of the unconditional which is deconstruction's only true allegiance.

According to Heidegger any call asks three questions; Caputo answers them from the perspective of deconstruction as follows:[111]

1. *Who or what is being called upon?* We are the ones called upon.
2. *Who or what is being called for?* The calling is for the fulfilment of the promises made by the traditions and institutions we have inherited, those who first assumed the impossible task of constructing a representation of the undeconstructible.
3. *Who or what is calling?* God, who is The Unconditional event.[112] Nevertheless, it is important to note that in Caputo´s theology God is not

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[110] This is what Caputo calls Derrida's "Jewish Principle" (*semper deconstruenda,* as described above) inspired by Tillich's "Protestant Principle" (*semper reformanda:* nothing finite and conditional can ever be adequate to the infinite and unconditional); Caputo, *The Folly of God*, 31.
[111] Caputo, *The Folly of God*, 87-88.

the Supreme Being of metaphysics because, according to him, such an idea is just one more product of *différance* (the interwoven matrices of meaning), a product which leads to dangerous militant theism. For him, "God" is an event that calls us even when it doesn't exist.[113] This conception is key for Caputo's differentiation between his proposed deconstructive "weak theology" and traditional apophatic theology. For him, even when both sound alike at some points the crucial difference is that the apophatic or mystical is intended as a doxology to "the highest of the high and the deepest of the deep."[114] Caputo is emphatic in stating that God, the unconditional, "does not exist; it insists. . . [even when] it is not a highest being, or even the ground of beings, or the hyper-being of apophatic tradition."[115] This idea is what gives Caputo the leverage to say that confessional bodies "do not know to whom they are praying. . . their

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[112] For Caputo, events are "what happens," humans assign imperfect names to try to describe these uncontainable events which is why a single event may receive many names; nevertheless, a name can never control that which it is trying to explain. See Stefan Stofanik, "Introduction to the Thinking of John Caputo: Religion without Religion is the Way out of Religion," in *Between Philosophy and Theology: Contemporary Interpretations of Christianity*, Ed. by Christophe Brabant and Lieven Boeve (Farnham, Surrey: Routledge, 2010), 20.
[113] Caputo, *Hoping Against Hope*, 107, 118, 122.
[114] Caputo, *The Folly of God*, 69-70.
[115] Ibid., 34.

confessional response to the call is but one of many possible responses to a call of ambiguous provenance."[116]

For Derrida, the call spooks the present with both ghosts from the past (*les revenants*) and ghosts from the future (*les arrivants*); this is the reason Caputo explains deconstruction as a *"hauntology"*[117] (a haunto-theology) that saves the old Ebenezer Scrooge through the terrifying ghosts of past and present. The Unconditional calls; we decide how to respond.

It is not in my interest to advocate for Caputo's theology; what I find useful is his perspective on what deconstruction is and how it works. I think we can learn from him and Derrida without necessarily espousing their theology; in fact, just because someone is deconstructing does not entail they would end up necessarily sharing their theological conclusions. That said, a person deconstructing can end up even further away from orthodoxy or much closer to it. I'll address the factors that can make a difference in the third section of this document.

2.4.1. Costa Rican Context: Lived Spiritualities, The Response to a Call

Many Costa Rican believers are responding to a call from God as best as they can given the current circumstances. When we take a closer look at actual practices of

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[116] Ibid., 50.
[117] Caputo, *Deconstruction in a Nutshell*, xxvii; see also, Caputo, *The Folly of God*, 30.

Christian believers in Costa Rica, we find they are indeed indifferent to certain beliefs by simply overlooking some doctrinal principles; nevertheless, there is an actual tendency towards a *bricolage*: a personal re-elaboration of religious beliefs.[118] Even when this phenomenon might not be ideal to some, I think it demonstrates there is still a deep spiritual hunger among many people. *Bricolage* religion is nothing new: "People have always mixed institutional religion with forms of popular piety;" the sacred and the profane have always existed in one way or another as a form of spiritual self-expression.[119]

For example, archeological discoveries from ancient Israelite sites have found not only amulets of the Egyptian dwarf-god Bes, but even manufacturing molds exposing the fact that these amulets were not just imported from other regions but they were also produced locally. The appeal of Bes was probably due to the fact that it was understood to be a guardian of newborns; even when Israelite women probably were not Bes worshipers, they could still find value in the amulets because visual symbols can migrate across cultures while retaining their symbolic power and not necessarily their theological meaning.[120] Findings such as these harmonize with the Biblical text, which continually cautions the Israelites against the dangers of idolatry, shining a light to a

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[118] Fuentes Belgrave, "Cambios en las Creencias Religiosas en Costa Rica," 53.
[119] Heidi A. Campbell, "Relationship Between Religion Online and Offline," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, March 2012, vol. 80, no. 1: 79.
[120] Carol Meyers, *Rediscovering Eve: Ancient Israelite Women in Context* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2013), 155.

reality many pastors are familiar with: the way in which believers live their religious lives on a personal level is not always–perhaps even rarely–orthodox. A bricolage spirituality is not interested so much in theological coherence as it is in "spirituality coherence,"[121] an expression of religious life as understood by an individual who appropriates a diverse set of beliefs and practices.

For Campbell and others, the internet has played an important role in the development of heterogeneous faith, especially by giving visibility to mixing practices of different sources that used to be on the fringes of organized religion.[122] The internet is just one aspect of what Rainie and Wellman identify as a triple revolution that is comprised by the internet, social networks, and mobile devices; it has made possible what the authors call "networked individuals." These networked individuals are people who "have partial membership in multiple networks and rely less on permanent memberships in settled groups."[123] It follows that a believer who is exposed to this triple revolution will not understand herself as purely Pentecostal, Lutheran, or other but probably as someone who attends a Pentecostal church while also incorporating Catholic practices, yoga, nutrition, and a variety of ethical decisions as part of her lived spirituality. This networked individual will probably not care if her denomination sanctions these practices and beliefs or not.

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[121] Scot McKnight, "Spirituality in a Postmodern Age", *Stone-Campbell Journal* 13 (Fall, 2010): 211.
[122] Campbell, "Relationship Between Religion Online and Offline," 79.
[123] Lee Rainie and Barry Wellman, *Networked: The New Social Operating System* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2012), 12.

Fuentes Belgrave's investigation in the Costa Rican context shows that the result of less religious practice is a greater re-elaboration of beliefs and a higher possibility to develop an "autonomous conscience."[124] This leads to a lay morality that shows disparities between what religious leaders preach and what lay believers belief and practice.[125] This lay morality seems to be selective; for example, 55% of Costa Ricans think abortion should be a personal decision regarding every woman, while an equal percentage rejects adoption by same-sex couples.[126] Perhaps this shows our society is undergoing a cultural transition.

Even when the author does not define the concept "autonomous conscience," what she probably means is that said conscience is independent from a given religious organization. If she meant "autonomous" simply as an individualistic, self-sufficient accomplishment, she would be naively idealizing the autonomy of the individual in a modernistic fashion. Rainie and Wellman assume the postmodern posture when they analyze the networked individual: "[people] think they make choices independently of others. We may think we are free agents, but there are others whose presence in our networks and broader environments shapes the decisions we make."[127] This means the location of believing individuals is crucial in the elaboration of said beliefs. This location not only encompasses time and space, but the different networks the person inhabits.

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[124] Fuentes Belgrave, "Cambios en las Creencias Religiosas en Costa Rica," 58.
[125] Ibid., 65.
[126] Murillo, "Encuesta CIEP-UCR Evidencia una Costa Rica Estatista y Menos Religiosa."
[127] Rainie and Wellman, *Networked: The New Social Operating System,* 38.

The role of the triple revolution in the development of faith is especially relevant in Costa Rica, a country that occupies second place in internet use in all of Latin America and where 8 out of every 10 people have internet access,[128] even if said access is not ideal, as the 2020 pandemic exposed.

The theory of the "networked individual" who has a partial membership yet remains influenced by these multiple networks, appears to be true in the Costa Rican context. Costa Rican practicing Catholics and practicing Evangelicals declare to be highly influenced by religious leaders in their daily lives, but even many non-practicing evangelicals admit remaining highly influenced by religious leaders.[129] Another interesting bit of data shows that while almost all religious practices are weakening in the general population of Costa Rica, prayer is the one practice privileged by most. This may be because one's prayer life takes place in a private context in which the believer decides when, where, and how it happens.[130] Costa Ricans are not necessarily losing their faith as such but are decidedly changing their religious habits. The evidence is pointing us to the reality that pastors should find ways to minister to those who are on the fringes of faith institutions while still making space for the pastoral voice; otherwise, we might waste the real opportunities of ministry while waiting for the ideal ones.

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[128] Revista Summa, "Estas Serán las Grandes Tendencias de Redes Sociales en el 2022," Revista Summa, November 16, 2021.
[129] Fuentes Belgrave, "Cambios en las Creencias Religiosas en Costa Rica," 65.
[130] Ibid., 61.

It is clear that Costa Ricans seem to be responding to a call that is reconfiguring their religious practices and beliefs, but it would be naïve to say that any voice who calls is God's; after all, the postmodern realization that we are immersed in multiple matrices of meaning or networks of influence also means we are exposed to a multiplicity of voices calling for our attention. The cultivation of discernment will be one of the key challenges for the church in this context. God is calling, but many other voices are calling, too.

2.4.2. Peter in Cornelius's House: The Call

Peter discovered there is uncertainty when the Unconditional calls. The voice of the Spirit directs him to follow three strangers into an unknown context. Once the apostle arrives, Cornelius confirms Peter's prejudice: the ignorant Gentile starts worshiping the apostle. After that awkward moment is dealt with, Peter little by little finds that the voice of The Unconditional calls whom he pleases in the way he pleases. Central to this Spirit-led experience is the revelation of what it means to call Jesus "Lord of all," a "theological statement gleaned from the experience and faith of the apostles, not something to be proved from the Torah or prophets."[131]

There is always a disorienting factor when a new voice calls or when we are called in a new way by an already known voice. In order to allow motion, there needs to

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[131] Willimon, *Acts*, 97-98.

be some shaking of the foundations (which does not necessarily imply an abandonment of these). By following the voice of this call, Peter's beliefs were deconstructed by the Sprit into a deeper, richer understanding of orthodoxy, through an experiential encounter with God that, from a Christian perspective, harmonized with the Scriptures in previously unforeseen ways.

2.4.3. Latin American Pentecostal Perspective: Discernment in a world of multiple voices

As mentioned before, a distinctive Pentecostal sensitivity is the special attention to the Holy Spirit, "an affective ability to notice the nuances of the Spirit;"[132] another of these sensitivities becomes relevant in this conversation, namely, a sense of spiritual warfare. Pentecostals believe there is a cosmic conflict, and the Spirit has empowered the church to be active participants in Christ's victory. When put together, these two sensitivities show the relevance of the Spirit's gift of discernment of spirits;[133] we could also say, discernment of voices.

To cultivate a discerning heart is a challenge for a networked individual whose over-exposure to information might lead him to believe he has found wisdom, whose over-stimulated brain might find it very hard to engage in silence, solitude, and prayer;

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[132] Albrecht and Howard, "Pentecostal Spirituality," 241.
[133] 1 Corinthians 12.10.

and whose unhealthy need for immediacy might preclude him from taking the time discernment demands.

Discernment is not an individualistic revelation but a communal exercise. First Corinthians frames it within the context of the body. In fact, when a prophet speaks, the church is not called to be a passive recipient but an active participant by judging that voice.[134] Calls demand discernment because God is not the only one who calls. Ignatian spirituality, which is highly charismatic, teaches that good and evil spirits operate in opposing ways: good spirits work in light and openness, producing love, joy, and peace; evil spirits work cloaked with secrecy and deception, producing confusion, doubt, and disgust.[135]

Teaching how to develop a discerning heart produces mature disciples who are able to follow the call into God's mission in new and daring ways. Kinnaman and Matlock talk about the importance of cultivating cultural discernment, defined as "the ability to compare beliefs, values, customs, and creations of the world we live in (digital Babylon) to those of the world we belong to (the kingdom of God)."[136] Teaching cultural discernment demands becoming "robust learning communities"[137] where critical

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[134] 1 Corinthians 14.29
[135] Joseph A. Tetlow, "Discernment in a Nutshell," Ignatian Spirituality, accessed January 24, 2022. https://www.ignatianspirituality.com/making-good-decisions/discernment-of-spirits/discernment-in-a-nutshell/
[136] David Kinnaman and Mark Matlock, *Faith for Exiles: 5 Ways for a New Generation to Follow Jesus in Digital Babylon* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2019), 74.
[137] Ibid., 93.

thinking is taught and encouraged, even if that means challenging supposedly prophetic voices. While Fuentes Belgrave's study showed that the less a believer engages in religious practice, the greater re-elaboration of beliefs, Peter experienced a re-elaboration of beliefs by faithfully engaging in Christian practice. The church should be a community where deconstructive experiences are nurtured by a mature discerning community. In the end, Christian discernment is not simply about decision-making; it is about faithfulness to God amid a multi-vocal world.

2.5. Deconstruction is a "yes" to the other

"deconstruction is 'yes,' is linked to the 'yes,' is an affirmation. . . .

When I say 'yes' to the other, in the form of a promise or an agreement or an

oath, the 'yes' must be absolutely inaugural."[138]

- J. Derrida -

Jacques Derrida was an outsider, an "European without quite being European, French without being French, Jewish without being Jewish, Algerian without being Algerian."[139] Watkin has the sensibility to warn us against reducing Derrida to his biography, acknowledging Derrida's own discomfort at this idea; yet, at this point I find

[138] Caputo, *Deconstruction in a Nutshell*, 27.
[139] Ibid., 114.

it relevant to echo some of Watkin's brief biographical remarks, showing Derrida was indeed "the other" who experienced his share of "no's" at a fairly young age.

Derrida was born in the city of El Biar, Algeria, at a time when it was officially part of France. While he was in school, it was customary that the top-of-the-class students would have the honor of raising the French flag, but because he was a Jew under a Nazi-sympathizing regime, Derrida was not only denied this honor but was eventually expelled.[140] He would later describe himself as a "little black and very Arab Jew"[141] and an "over-acculturated, over-colonized European hybrid."[142] It makes a lot of sense that after experiencing the ethical failures of modernity he would deem it important to say "yes to the other."

Deconstruction raises an eyebrow before expressions such as "we" or "our" for these suggest a group shares a particular historical experience;[143] words like "community" imply a harmony and consensus that do not necessarily exist between insiders while simultaneously assuming defensive postures toward outsiders. Deconstruction, on the other hand, is porous, open to the other, and never defensive; it is not afraid of people being different; it thrives on dissimilarities.

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[140] Watkin, *Jacques Derrida*, 1-2.
[141] Jacques Derrida and Geoffrey Bennington, *Circumfession*, in *Jacques Derrida*, Trans. Geoffrey Bennington (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 51.
[142] Jacques Derrida, *The Other Heading: Reflections on Today's Europe.* Trans. Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael Naas (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995), 7.
[143] See *Points de Suspension: Entretiens*. Ed. Elisabeth Weber. Paris: Galilée, 1992. Eng. Trans. Points, 366.

For Derrida the problem we face is not relativism; things are not relative but incommensurable, making it impossible to do justice to them if we dare to compare. What incommensurability means is that "every other is wholly other;"[144] and if we fail to respect this singularity, we are acting violently towards the other; paradoxically, as expected in deconstruction, we cannot completely avoid this violence. Yet, as we have learned, deconstruction is constantly after the impossible.

One way we say no to the other is through the protection afforded by traditions, when we allow "the first reading [to] become the last word."[145] Deconstruction defends the tension between dominant and transgressive readings of the great traditions, while conservatism seeks to solve this tension by always going back to the classical reading.

The challenge of every community is retaining its own identity while remaining open to outsiders. So, instead of community, deconstruction prefers to talk about hospitality: welcoming the stranger. This kind of hospitality resists the temptation of being limited or, even worse, degrading into welcoming the same while being hostile to the stranger;[146] an impossible kind of hospitality that "does not come down to knowing anything, but to doing something,"[147] just like deconstruction itself.

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[144] Watkin, *Jacques Derrida*, 29-35.
[145] Caputo, *Deconstruction in a Nutshell*, 79, 81.
[146] See Caputo, *Deconstruction in a Nutshell*, 108-110 and Caputo, *The Folly of God*, 63.
[147] Caputo, *Deconstruction in a Nutshell*, 112.

2.5.1. Costa Rican Context: Globalization and Pluralism, When The "Yes to the Other" is Not Reciprocal

Globalization is a broad and complex concept, but social theorists in general agree that it "refers to fundamental changes in the spatial and temporal contours of social existence, according to which the significance of space or territory undergoes shifts in the face of a no less dramatic acceleration in the temporal structure of crucial forms of human activity."[148] The basic components of globalization are: 1) deterritorialization, a multiplicity of social activities increasingly takes place regardless of the physical location of partakers; 2) interconnectedness across boundaries permits distant forces to impact local and regional events; 3) an acceleration of crucial forms of social activity; 4) a long-term process with nonuniversal and varying degrees of impact; 5) multi-pronged process whose effects can be seen in culture, economy, politics, and other aspects of life.

The influence of this phenomenon is strongly felt in the global South. "It has become the single most powerful narrative reshaping the economies of the world, national identities, and social relationships between peoples."[149] Roxburgh calls it a secular theology because it offers an alternative vision of salvation and eschaton; the market is given the power to unite and renew the world. Of course, it demands the offering of lives to submit to its "around-the-world, around-the-clock" markets, making

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[148] William Scheuerman, "Globalization," in Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy Archive, Summer 2014 ed.
[149] Alan J. Roxburgh, *Missional Map-Making: Skills for Leading in Times of Transition* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2010), 90.

it difficult for individuals to have other priorities such as family or church. One can see the challenge for nurturing the kind of spirituality that seeks to remain constantly open to the direction of the Holy Spirit; an around-the-clock job does not leave room or energy for contemplation.

Costa Rica's high level of literacy has placed the country in an ideal place to participate in globalization allowing big names like Microsoft, Kimberly-Clark, Marriot, Four Seasons, Intel, Hewlett-Packard, Amazon, and many others to find a highly skilled work force while receiving many benefits from the government that local businesses do not receive. Of course, they are also in a position to provide many benefits to the employees that local businesses cannot provide.

Globalization also provides great opportunities for the global church to exert its influence around the world. Believers can communicate and travel to many different places while living out their faith in professional circles. This can represent a challenge yet is possible. Ministries and missionaries can find easier access to communication and travel; because of global interconnectedness, cooperation between local ministries from around the world has never been easier.

Nevertheless, globalization can also turn out to be just another form of imperialism.[150] The first step to participate of global salvation is learning the English

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[150] Philip Jenkins, *The Next Christendom: The Coming of Global Christianity* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, Inc., 2011), 16.

language and with it different forms of inculturation. Older generations perceive huge cultural differences when engaging in a globalized world, while new generations naturally adopt the new reality as part of their identity. This change allows them unprecedented cross-cultural agility, but the newly developed identity can also hinder them from connecting to their roots. In the long run, a new culture markedly defined by the dominant one is being created.

Globalization and pluralism are related but in constant tension, many times even in conflict; while the latter promotes a vision of a universal Western framework, the former envisions "a world in which no single power exercises hegemony and no single belief or ideology dominates."[151] Many cultures which appeared to be monolithic are exposed to other customs and beliefs, making the pluralistic phenomenon either an enriching experience that provides new perspectives or a disorienting loss that menaces identity. Either way, the pluralistic culture invites people into bricolage faith; understanding doctrines as points of view, and experimenting with fragments of other traditions and religions to find whatever suits one's lifestyle.

Migration also presents challenges regarding pluralism. Costa Rica is the only country in the Central American region with a positive value of net migration, meaning there are more people coming than those leaving.[152] Most immigrants come from

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[151] Roxburgh, *Missional Map-Making*, 94.
[152] Banco Mundial, *"Migración Neta - Costa Rica,"* 2017. https://datos.bancomundial.org/indicator/SM.POP.NETM?locations=CR&view=map

Nicaragua trying to find jobs and better opportunities; many others come fleeing Venezuela's crisis; but there are also plenty of immigrants who come for tourism, education, and business (not always with best intentions, there is a big human trafficking problem in the country), which means Costa Ricans are exposed on a regular basis to a wide range of ideas and lifestyles from places such as Asia, Europe, and North America.

The effects of globalization as imperialism are evidenced by the power differentials between global relationships. Once a person gets her voice "out there," she'll find out the volume assigned to each voice is not necessarily equal, or at least not heard in the same way. A common challenge for Latin American theologians, for example, is that they do not do theology like Westerners; they do "Latin American theology." Jenkins narrates the encounter a leader from the global South had with a leader from a mainstream Western denomination; the Westerner said with contempt, "your beliefs are too young;" the comeback from the global South leader was noteworthy, "all heresies emanated from you, have flourished among you; by us, that is by the Southern nations, they have been here strangled, here put an end to." Jenkins also recognizes the general disdain academics have towards Pentecostalism and anything related to fundamentalism.[153] It is in this climate that we, Latin American Pentecostals,

[153] Jenkins, *The Next Christendom,* 258, 271.

look toward the future from the global South trying to find the ways in which we should serve global Christianity.

There is also a set of expectations from Western churches over global South churches, especially from ministries in the United States where *tico*[154] ministries have cultivated a lot of connections historically. Both liberals and conservatives project their expectations toward Latin American ministries liberals because of the region's strong attraction towards socialism, conservatives because of the long history of conservatism in the area. Will there be any room for Costa Rican ministries to define their global identities? What would happen if *tico* ministries do not comply to foreign expectations? Will Costa Rican voices be cancelled by liberals or conservatives? Will resources be held back? Just imagine gentile churches holding back their offerings because of their differences with the church in Jerusalem! How much room will Costa Rican Pentecostals be given by religious forces to influence worldwide Christianity? Would it just come to a matter of getting enough critical mass not to be ignored? The rules in order to get a seat at the global table are neither uniform nor universal.

The famed postmodern openness to religion can be very selective. It is still very much influenced by modernity's belief in reason and reliance on the material world. There appears to be a certain fear of not being believed by the modern project. I think

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[154] An affectionate way to say "Costa Ricans," it comes from the Costa Rican longstanding tendency to use diminutives, e.g. *chiquitico* (tiny), *cositico* (little thing), *llenitico* (completely full, as you can see the usage of the diminutive does not have to make sense).

Caputo's ideas about a metaphysical God (which follow after Tillich's thoughts) show this: "God insists, but God does not exist;"[155] "the folly of the kingdom of God does not need God. In fact, the Supreme Being would ruin everything;"[156] "everything we say about God is symbolic;"[157] and "the mythological sets in when we literalize the symbolic, when we forget that the symbol is a symbol."[158] So, Caputo proposes the idea of a nonpersonal God assuming a kind of apologetic posture while trying to transcend the theist-atheist debate; the following unfortunate paragraph gives context to his concern:

> *Religion, with its unrelenting supernaturalism and mythologizing, is making itself more and more unbelievable and is seeing to it that belief flourishes best among the most deprived and desperate, the poorest and the most undereducated people on the globe, while finding itself increasingly irrelevant to everyone else. . . . once an individual or a culture reaches a certain stage of intellectual clarity and economic stability, even after centuries of doctrinal servitude, its religious beliefs become, well, unbelievable and incur mass incredulity. . . . [this] is beginning to happen among the growing middle class in South America*[159]

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[155] Caputo, *The Folly of God*, 77-76.
[156] Ibid., 112.
[157] Ibid., 15.
[158] Ibid., 17.
[159] Ibid., 76.

As a Latin American I cannot help but feel like Caputo shares the same intellectual sense of superiority as those atheists (not all) who look down on people who believe there is a God. While writing a book devoted to *The Folly of God,* Caputo rejects the ideas others might have about God, treating them as too foolish (uneducated). Deconstruction is about openness to the other, the other being "the outsider, the enemy, the weak and hurting, the person in need, the powerless and homeless;"[160] nevertheless, this posture from Caputo seems quite closed to the *other* church, the church in the global South which is "quite at home with biblical notions of the supernatural."[161] His expression sounds like there really is no place for the *other* church in Western postmodernity, unless this *other* church embraces a totalizing narrative pushed by those with access to "real" knowledge and the privilege of deconstruction.

Caputo also seems to assume the decrease in number of practicing believers we are seeing in places with a strong middle class, such as Costa Rica, implies a preference for atheism or at least with finding the idea of a metaphysical higher being to be problematic, but in my experience, this is just not true. Most people who leave faith communities still hold a strong belief in the traditional concept of God.

This postmodern urge to be accepted by modern ideals can be seen in other deconstructionists such as Philip Gulley who envisions a church that "will not insist we

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[160] Olson, *The Journey of Modern Theology,* 693.
[161] Jenkins, *The Next Christendom,* 273.

believe the absurd, affirm the incredible."[162] I wholeheartedly share Gulley's longing for a church that will be a friend of science (e.g., our local church unambiguously promoted the use of masks and vaccines during the COVID pandemic, to the point of being a vaccination center), but Latin American Pentecostals believe there are things beyond science; with Caputo and Paul we affirm there is folly (according to human standards) in following Christ.

2.5.2. Peter in Cornelius´ House: A "Yes" To The Other Believers

The Spirit is clearly working in Peter's heart to move him from a resounding "no" to the other believers to an embracing and sincere "yes." God´s plan amazes the apostle. All along the divine was working towards the inclusion of all the world in Abraham´s promise.

A relationship between the Jewish apostle and the Roman centurion presented many challenges. Cornelius represented the imperial forces that subjugated Israel, but still he was devout! Peter represented the Kingdom of God that reconciles the world to him, but still he would not sit at a gentile table! Both men were simultaneously at the center and at the fringes. Cornelius was at the center of political power but on the fringes of religion. Peter was at the center of Christian power but on the fringes of

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[162] Philip Gulley, *The Evolution of Faith: How God Is Creating a Better Christianity* (New York, NY: Harper One, 2011), 8-9.

political power. God stands in between both men to bring them together; both are invited to a mutual encounter orchestrated actively by the divine. Cornelius sincerely opened his home while Peter reluctantly accepted the invitation.

In a way each man needs something the other has, but since the Spirit interrupts the apostle´s speech, we could say the story is more about what the apostle learned than about what the centurion received from the apostle. In the end it was not the amazing, supernatural vision that transformed Peter in the privacy of prayer time, but a shared experience with those in the religious margins during a God-designed encounter in which the apostle seems almost as a spectator.

We can now see what Justo González mentions about the Church's expansion in Acts by setting borders, points of mutual encounter that led to *mestizaje* experiences. Willimon points out the dual nature of Peter and Cornelius' story; they both have a vision and make speeches because "both Cornelius and Peter need changing if God's mission is to go forward."[163] The Call is framed by a purpose, opening up "joyous new possibilities for community."[164] God is the one saying "yes to the other"; the church follows his lead.

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[163] Willimon, *Acts*, 96.
[164] Ibid., 97.

2.5.3 Latin American Pentecostal Perspective: Finding God in the Others

The Holy Spirit actively creates spaces for mutual human encounter within the divine. This is celebrated by the Pentecostal church in at least two ways.

First, Pentecostal spirituality is characterized by the value of participation.[165] The Spirit bestows gifts on each member of the church body in such a way that every person has something that someone else needs and a single person will always need something someone else has. The Church comes together to minister to one another by freely giving what they freely received. This leads to a dynamic relationship between the corporate and the personal; the Spirit constantly speaks to individuals in private spaces so they can share and minister to the community, and the community expects and celebrates personal experiences. Pentecostal spirituality, then, bends towards the organic instead of the structure, so much so that Paul needs to structure Corinthian charismatic celebrations.

The Pentecostal awareness of the polycentric nature of the church is seen in how the movement has interpreted the roles described by Ephesians 4.11 as an ongoing reality. Local Pentecostal churches actively cultivate the development of people who can function as apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers because Christ keeps providing for his Church through the Spirit. Even when there is still room to grow in

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[165] Albrecht & Howard, "Pentecostal Spirituality," 243.

this aspect in Latin America, healthy local Pentecostal leadership seeks to be polycentric, i.e., the constant interaction between a variety of anointed believers called to minister Christ's church.

A second aspect that positions Pentecostal spirituality to say "yes to the other" comes from its "eschatological orientation to mission and justice. . . expressed in terms of empowerment, with a preferential option for the marginalized."[166] This happens with a sense of urgency, because according to the prophet Joel, the Spirit is poured by God "in the last days." This eschatology "engenders a commitment to mission and to ministries of empowerment and social justice"[167] because the Pentecostal church understands clearly that the Spirit moves among those who "are not," as in Corinth.

One final thought on this point is that deconstruction should not just be sealed by a "yes to the other," but first and foremost a "yes to The Other," to the one who is calling. Pentecostal spirituality not only believes God insists, but that he also exists. The one who is calling deserves a response; saying "yes" to him will always lead us into a "yes to the other."

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[166] Smith, *"Thinking in Tongues,"* 12.
[167] Ibid., 45.

2.6. Deconstruction is affirmative of institutions. . . is not destruction

> *What is called deconstruction. . . has never, never opposed institutions as such. . . I think that the life of an institution implies that we are able to criticize, to transform, to open the institution to its own future. . . If an institution is to be an institution, it must to some extent break with the past, keep the memory of the past, while inaugurating something absolutely new.*[168]
>
> *- J. Derrida -*

Hans-Georg Gadamer was a continental philosopher like Derrida who in 1960 published *Truth and Method*, a work which portrays his understanding of philosophical hermeneutics. Much a-la-Derrida, he understood his work more as a theory than a method. For him, tradition is what happens to us, we are immersed in it, we belong to history; we first understand ourselves and our world through contexts which provide us with prejudices.[169] According to Gadamer tradition provides a place to stand, making interpretation possible, but at the same time, it limits what we can see from that standpoint. He also recognizes we are formed by a plurality of traditions; in my case I was formed by the interaction of the Costa Rican tradition, the Pentecostal tradition, and

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[168] Caputo, *Deconstruction in a Nutshell*, 5-6.
[169] Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, trans. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall, 2nd ed. (New York: Crossroad, 2004), 277-278.

the Christian tradition; all of these are at the same time made up by multiple streams of traditions (similar to Derrida's reasoning). Consequently, an infinite number of interpretations is possible, but this does not mean all interpretations will be valid or illuminating.[170]

Gadamer's insight that we belong to history is very important because it helps us appreciate that *traditions are identities*. These are not simply a set of ideas, customs, and habits. Traditions are an essential part of being human. Even if these traditions are to be challenged, Gadamer understands that they deserve our respect; as he notes, "the discovery that parental traditions are finite and fallible is not the discovery (1) that they are always wrong or (2) that we ourselves are somehow infinite and infallible."[171] To treat traditions with respect from a postmodern perspective means to recognize that even if their authority is not absolute, there may be truth within them.[172]

The *destruction* of religion is the "modern critical approach to religion"; the postmodern approach, on the other hand, is one of "repetition,"[173] but a kind of repetition that is more faithful to The Unconditional (God) than to tradition. Institutions are the champions of tradition. In the language of faith, institutions take the form of confessional religions. Even when these are seen as conditioned responses to The Unconditional according to deconstruction, still "that does not mean the confessional

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[170] Westphal, *Whose Community? Which Interpretation?*, 71.
[171] Ibid., 75.
[172] Ibid., 75.
[173] Caputo, *Hoping Against Hope*, 19.

theologies are to be taken lightly or simply brushed aside."[174] Deconstruction is not against tradition but against conservatism; it seeks to keep tradition alive by forcing us to recognize the multiplicity within its history and demanding that we take responsibility for the traditions to which we hold on to.[175] Once again, we can see deconstruction is about maintaining tensions between a recognition of the past (fidelity) and the affirmation of the future (hope). Deconstruction is about memory as well as innovation.

Both Derrida and Caputo worked in educational institutions (Caputo still does), and none of them were ever accused of setting them on fire (at least in a literal way). Their praxis attests that deconstructionists do find value in institutions and can be an active part in building them. The book *Deconstruction in a Nutshell* exists precisely because Derrida and Caputo were inaugurating a new program at Villanova University, a Roman Catholic school.

Deconstruction is affirmative of institutions, not opposed to them. Deconstructionists are called to work within institutions for the benefit of these, out of faithfulness to The Unconditional. They continually affirm the truth found within the inherited traditions, while challenging the inherited misconceptions.

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[174] Caputo, *The Folly of God*, 49.
[175] Caputo, *Deconstruction in a Nutshell*, 37, see also Caputo, *The Folly of God*, 30.

2.6.1. Costa Rican Context: Current Challenges for Institutions

The forces of globalization and pluralism are connected to the miracle of accelerated technological advances, "the shared experience of living in a highly technological era provides a universal ground for a pluralistic society."[176] Technology provides the center of gravity that pulls everything together. This global community is comprised by individuals who are quickly learning that technological savviness is rewarded with flexibility, autonomy, and authority. In this context independent thinking is not only an advantage, but also expected.

Many times, this reality is assumed uncritically because even when technology's power and influence is omnipresent in our daily lives, it is easy to overlook its effects. Theologian and producer Craig Detweiler meditates on the faith society places over technology:

> *Our faith in technology is so pervasive it is often blind. . . . Our faith in technology is impatient. It does not tolerate delays. . . . Our faith in technology connects us to long lost friends. It also enables us to avoid people we'd rather text with than talk to. . . . Our faith in technology is so widespread that we feel we must be always available. . . . Our faith in technology is so complete that we place devices into our children's hands at*

[176] Brett T. Robinson, *Appletopia: Media Technology and the Religious Imagination of Steve Jobs* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2013), 104.

earlier ages and stages… Our faith in technology is so passionate that we rarely question the wisdom of our embrace.[177]

Perhaps we could say technology is the promised messiah that will inaugurate globalization's eschaton, that which will finally bring salvation to humanity and save us even from ourselves. As Costa Rican society increasingly incorporates new technologies in daily life, we run the risk of placing our faith and hope in the idols of modernity. Detweiler reminds us of technology's transformational power not only affects our environment but also our inner world: "our defining technologies tend to define us (and our beliefs)."[178] A good example is the idea of seeing God as a great Watchmaker and Creation as the perfectly calibrated mechanism he set in motion. The influence technology exerts (whether we are aware of it or not) is altering *how* we believe, even *what* we believe. As our hearts get captured by technology, it would be wise to remember that *as we worship, so we live, so we believe*.[179]

Thanks to technology people no longer have to go to church in order to access resources traditionally managed by it: "the church's monopoly on Christian instruction is over. People feel quite free to join in theological discourse without the buffer of the

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[177] Craig Detweiler, *iGods: How Technology Shapes Our Spiritual and Social Lives* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2013), 1-2.
[178] Ibid., 25.
[179] "*lex orandi, lex credendi, lex vivendi.*"

church or its clergy."[180] This allows them to also use unconventional resources next to the ones they are used to. Robinson reminds us technology has been democratizing religious ideas since the invention of the press, but the computer has decentralized these ideas like never before, producing a new Internet-age ethic "rooted in free expression, a breakdown of hierarchy, a sense of individual empowerment, and a distrust of central authority."[181] The selfie generation has embraced the idea of a "personal relationship with Jesus," quite popular among Evangelical circles, and has taken it to mean an "excluding relationship with Jesus" that disallows any opinion coming from others, especially formal authorities. For some people the notion of religious authority is tied with control of religious resources, affirming that "the authority of leaders diminishes when a medium allows different people to have open access and gain greater control over knowledge and social information."[182] However this is only true if authority is interpreted as control. The fact that controlling leaders are losing their grip over the monopoly of narratives and information is a positive trend, yet this kind of leadership is not a reflection of true New Testament models of authority which are kenotic in nature.

In a context in which "structured and bounded organizations are becoming supplanted by more *ad hoc*, open, and informal networks of civic involvement and

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[180] Gulley, *The Evolution of Faith*, 5.
[181] Robinson, *Appletopia*, 12.
[182] Pauline Hope Cheong, "*Authority*," in *Digital Religion: Understanding Religious Practice in New Media Worlds*, edited by Heidi A. Campbell (New York, NY: Routledge, 2013), 72.

religious practice,"[183] how should churches function? Paradoxically, the mistrust of formal authority happens alongside the illusion of intimacy with total strangers, created by shared spaces of conversation with people completely alien to a person's immediate context such as celebrities, influencers, politicians, and many others. Because of the spaces created by technology, those close to us are not worthy of our trust while strangers feel like friends.

A changing world demands transformation in the way the exercise of ministry has been constructed. Hopefully, more than just adapting to changes, leaders will learn because they love those they are called to minister. In a tech-obsessed world, it makes a huge difference to assume a more egalitarian approach to ministry, honoring the priesthood of all believers, as well as a assuming a listening posture. Institutions need to be deconstructed and reconstructed for their own sake. The church as an institution should revise its methodologies.

2.6.2. Peter in Cornelius' House: The Institutionalized Church of Acts

After such an amazing experience, Peter goes to the church in Jerusalem to explain what took place, initiating a conversation that would take several years. We can see that from the earliest days the church assumed some sort of institutionalized structure to which even the apostle Peter was held accountable. The apostle's

[183] Rainie and Wellman, *Networked*, 29.

deconstructive experience did not detach him from the church; it was used to plant a seed that would bear fruit in the coming years.

Willimon notes how in this section Luke places several conversion stories in succession to symbolize groups of converts, which are the fulfilment of the promise that the gospel would reach the ends of the world. These are unexpected acts of divine grace that point to new beginnings.[184] In these new beginnings, the Spirit never condemns the existence of an institutionalized structure in the church, even when it had to enter in heated discussions while trying to make sense of the new reality. The Spirit constantly breathes new life on such an institution, actively participating to the point that it could be said "it seemed good to the Spirit and to us."[185]

Institutions do not (and should not) exist for the sake of institutions, but for the benefit of the people they were formed to serve. Yes, traditions should be acknowledged as forms of communal and personal identities, that contain ancient wisdom from which new generations can draw and grow; but of which they will also be held accountable.

2.6.3. Latin American Pentecostal Perspective: The Church As The Place Where Deconstruction Happens

In a chapter in *The Pedagogics of Unlearning,* Caputo addresses how deconstruction can be applied to the context of educational institutions. Caputo shows

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[184] Willimon, *Acts*, 100-104.
[185] Acts 15.28.

how these institutions should be the place where students are unsettled, disturbed, and provoked in ways they never imagined before; according to him Derrida "has in mind a positive idea of institutions as a scene of the event. Deconstruction is all about institutions —schools, hospitals, political bodies, courts, museums— and how to keep them in creative disequilibrium without tipping over."[186] The role of the teacher must be conceived as one who does not attempt to manipulate the event but one who works with a weak force, in a middle voice as a caretaker of the event, not its master. Caputo explicitly states, "the school must be the place in which the event is possible."[187] If this is true, then it is also true that *the church must be the place in which the event is possible*.

In schools as places for the event there is a program for education, but this is not meant to program the student; there is actually room within the program to expose the student to chance and exploration of what may haunt the learning process.[188] This happens to be a very pneumatic posture. As Jesus was breaking new ground in a class with a highly advanced student, he introduced him to a similar idea: "The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit."[189] Education in the local

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[186] John D. Caputo, "Teaching the Event: Deconstruction, Hauntology, and the Scene of Pedagogy," In *The Pedagogics of Unlearning*. Edited by Éamonn Dunne and Aidan Seery. Earth, Milky Way: Punctum Books, 2016, 121.
[187] *Ibid.*, 123.
[188] *Ibid.*, 126.
[189] John 3.8

church must plan to expose believers to unexpected ideas and teach them to navigate the winds of the Spirit.

One of the ways in which Smith's "radical openness to God" manifests itself is what Albrecht and Howard identify as the Pentecostal value for *restoration*. Pentecostalism understands itself as a radical restoration of God's dealing with humanity. Such restoration created a tension with traditional Christianity even when it was understood as gift for the whole church, something that Charismatic movements executed better.[190] Pentecostalism itself has been like Peter standing before the church in Jerusalem, calling for the restoration of the Spirit's movement at a global scale. At the same time we can expect "little Peters" to stand within their local Pentecostal churches, being a voice for restoration and Spirit-infused deconstruction at the local level.

As Caputo probably expects, schools will always need to teach methods, mathematical formulas, philosophical principles; but he also expects this to happen with a radical openness to new surprises. Pentecostal discipleship should embrace what some call "radical orthodoxy"[191] (which is a matter of Christian identity) while also being radically open to the move of the Spirit, who comes to renew his church by affirming us into deeper orthodoxy while confronting human-made constructions that hinder the church's mission.

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[190] Albrecht and Howard, "Pentecostal Spirituality," 247.
[191] See chapter 5 of James K.A. Smith, *Who's Afraid of Postmodernism: Taking Derrida, Lyotard, and Foucault to Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2006).

Pentecost was the celebration of the law being given to Moses at Mount Sinai, the most orthodox moment, but now it was presented in a new way to the Christian church, the coming of the Spirit in a new season. This is what Caputo would call the balance between the *ruly* and the *unruly,* where deconstruction thrives. With Pentecost in mind Wariboko proposes The Pentecostal Principle: "the capacity to being. It encapsulates the notion that no finite or conditioned reality can claim to have reached its destiny. . . every end has only one option: to be a new beginning."[192] May the church be a place of amazement, new beginnings, and a constant search after The Unconditional.

[192] Wariboko, *The Pentecostal Principle,* 1.

3. A Pastoral Approach to Deconstruction for Latin American Pentecostal Faith Communities

I have proposed we pay attention to six important characteristics that describe deconstruction. We know deconstruction 1) happens, 2) it happens from the inside, 3) it is not a method, 4) deconstruction is call, 5) it is a yes to the other, and 6) it is affirmative of institutions. I have also proposed that there can be a relationship between the work of the Spirit and deconstructive experiences, especially when we take into account these six descriptions from Derrida. In guiding us to all truth, the Spirit also guides us into experiences in which we need to deconstruct certain beliefs to ultimately help us mature in our faith in Christ. Here lies the pastoral concern: How can pastors faithfully help people going through deconstructive experiences? How would a faithful and wise pastoral approach look like in such circumstances?

Considering the four Christian responses to postmodern influences posed by Padgett, it must be obvious by now that I do not agree with simply ignoring (the ostrich) or satanizing (the bogeyman) deconstruction. These responses cannot be regarded as a faithful approach from the church, even if they are common. We are left with two possible responses, seeing deconstruction as our "best buddy" or as a critical dialogue partner.[1] There might be a scenario in which deconstruction *can* be one of our best

[1] In Alan Padgett, "Christianity and Postmodernity," *Christian Scholar's Review* 26:2 (winter 1996): 129.

buddies in faith formation, *if* we engage it in critical dialogue. If being a best buddy is too big of a title, perhaps we could at least see it as an aide.

At this point, the role of the pastor as a practical theologian is of upmost importance. Richard Osmer suggests four core tasks of practical theology. These are born from asking key questions in the pastoral context, the resulting answers are helpful guide to navigate the realities of ministry. The four questions are: *what is going on?* (gathering information to identify patterns or episodes), *why is this going on?* (explain the reasons behind certain patterns), *what ought to be going on?* (determine good practices), and *how might we respond?* (determining strategies).[2] These questions will guide the final section of this work, while we consider what would be an appropriate pastoral response to deconstruction of faith from a Latin American Pentecostal perspective.

3.1. The Descriptive Empirical Task: What is Going On?

To respond to the pastoral question of "what is going on?" it is useful to describe faith deconstruction as a process; this will provide a mental structure that pastors can use to better serve their churches.

The experience of faith transformation, how it is deconstructed and reconstructed back again, can be described in many ways. Marcus Borg simply describes

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[2] Richard R. Osmer, *Practical Theology: An Introduction* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2008), 4.

it as *memories*, what he observed growing up; *conversions*, major changes in his understanding; and *convictions*, the affirmations flowing from those changes. For Borg, these changes manifested themselves as intellectual, political, and religious thoughts and practices.[3] Alternatively, Father Rohr sees faith transformation as three boxes people move from; these are *order*, in which everything is explained fairly simply; *disorder*, when our ordered universe disappoints us so we assume the postmodern stance of distrust and skepticism about everything and everyone; and *reorder*, where the best of the conservative and liberal positions come together and "radical traditionalists" love their truth and community enough to critique it without overreacting or over-defending.[4] Brian McLaren likewise uses threefold imagery; he talks about the painful and traumatic death of Good Friday in which we witness the collapse of our faith system, the silent and contemplative Saturday, and the beautiful and deep Easter Sunday where we move from organized religion to organizing religion for the common good.[5]

For his part, A.J. Swoboda, after acknowledging the work of Fowler and Peterson on faith development,[6] also proposes a triple framework: *theological construction*, in

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[3] Marcus J. Borg, *Convictions: How I Learned What Matters Most* (Broadway, NY: HarperCollins Publishers, 2014), 19.
[4] Richard Rohr, *The Universal Christ: How a Forgotten Reality Can Change Everything We See, Hope for, and Believe* (New York, NY: Convergent Books, 2019), 245-246.
[5] Brian D. McLaren, *The Great Spiritual Migration: How the World's Largest Religion is Seeking a Better Way to be a Christian* (New York, NY: Convergent Books, 2016), 13-14.
[6] James Fowler proposed seven stages of faith formation: primal-undifferentiated faith, intuitive-projective faith, mythic-literal faith, synthetic-conventional faith, individuative-reflective faith, conjunctive faith, and

which uncritical assent causes good and bad beliefs to be accepted; *theological deconstruction*, which happens when we stop thinking our faith works (at this stage it is hard to differentiate the deconstruction of wrong beliefs from the deconstruction of faith all together); and *reconstruction*, a point that not everyone reaches but is a return to the first love that demands courage and intentionality.[7]

As a therapist and pastor, Mark Gregory Karris provides insight on the emotional and social aspects experienced during the faith journey with special attention to the deconstructive stage. He identifies five symptoms of what he calls Religious Disorientation Growth Syndrome:[8]

1. Doubting or denying beliefs once held to be true
2. Anxiety about one's relationship with God
3. Increase of painful emotions
4. Feared or realized isolation and criticism from family members or faith community
5. Existential angst about one's identity and future

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universalizing faith; see Fowler, *Stages of Faith: The Psychology of Human Development and the Quest for Meaning* (New York, NY: HarperCollins, 1995). Eugene Peterson's framework is based on the Pentateuch: Genesis, the prenatal word of God; Exodus, the birth and infancy; Leviticus, childhood; Numbers, adolescence; and Deuteronomy, adulthood; see Peterson, *Working the Angles: The Shape of Pastoral Integrity* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1995), 59-61.

[7] A. J. Swoboda, *After Doubt: How to Question Your Faith Without Losing It* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2021), 23-28.

[8] Mark Gregory Karris, *Religious Refugees: (De)Constructing Toward Spiritual and Emotional Healing* (Orange, California: Quoir, 2020), 18-19.

Karris prefers the term "different stations" when he talks about the faith journey. This language helps to avoid the idea that people must move from one place to the other in their faith journey and that one place is superior to the other. These stations are:[9]

1. *Feeling at home*, church and faith provide emotional security with little doubt.
2. *Splinterhood*, the cognitive dissonance of holding together two apparently contradictory ideas causes increasing tension and great discomfort.
3. *To be or not to be*, is the stage in which a person feels forced to act. If no action is taken, then psychological defense mechanisms such as repression or suppression take place.
4. *Returning home different,* represents the decision of going back to safe places and relationships with little change. The return might happen out of fear of God, losing relationships, hurting loved ones, or even losing oneself.
5. *Disorientation,* some might travel easily through this station, while others display PTSD symptoms. At this point the person has a very different perception of self, God, and/or church. Even when there are feelings of anger, grief, depression, moral confusion, and similar; these can lead to profound growth and transformation.
6. *Angstville*, the predominant emotion here is anger. This sentiment might be intimidating for the person or those around him; nevertheless, it is valid,

[9] Ibid., 53-74.

especially when we reflect on the witness of imprecatory psalms and laments. It is a fact that some systems of theological or ideological oppression demand an angry response. Some people here still identify as Christians, others leave their faith, and others claim to have left God and church but invest an immense amount of energy against the faith because they still have a strong relationship with it. This stage is dangerous because doubt and cynicism can become a person's new faith. Karris believes some people stuck in this station might need the proper tools to grieve so post-traumatic church syndrome can become post-traumatic growth.

7. *Farewell and Goodbye*, some religious refugees find a new home away from Christian tradition and experience a newfound sense of freedom. Even when they still experience anger against some Christian ideologies, this anger is not reactive but elicits compassionate responses.
8. *Extreme Makeover-Home Edition*, at this station we find those believers who have embraced profound growth and transformation. They have fused fundamentalist and progressive faith, and they belief in a God who is greater than any human understanding but are still on a life-long search. Instead of control, they long for intimacy. They embrace paradox and mystery. They love the church as a living organism.

Karris's work alerts pastors of the need of psychological support in some instances. Wise pastors connect people to multiple resources because they understand they cannot, and should not, do it all.

Conclusion, the descriptive-empirical task

Pastors do not engage in the descriptive-empirical task out of mere curiosity about what is going. The pastoral heart understands the answer to this question and allows the practice of a spirituality of presence: "spiritual orientation of attending to others in their particularity and otherness. . . with openness, attentiveness, and prayerfulness."[10] Being present in this way is what allows the pastor to be faithful to Christ, his calling, and his church; this spirituality of presence describes the kind of pastor that people going through deconstructive experiences need.

3.2. The Interpretive Task: Why is this going on?

The interpretive task seeks to answer the question: *why is this going on?* There are multiple reasons that might lead a person to deconstruct his faith. According to Borg conversion events may be "sudden and dramatic. . . or, more commonly, gradual and accumulative."[11] I would like to submit a few possible causes for consideration.

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[10] Osmer, *Practical Theology,* 34.
[11] Borg, *Convictions,* 28.

1. **Differentiation**. For some people, deconstruction is a natural part of their development and maturity; it is a way of finding and asserting one´s identity in contrast to that of parents or other significant people in one´s life.[12] Many times the formation received in previous stages of life will prove insufficient for a current period; discipleship should be approached from a lifelong perspective.
2. **Intellectual or theological curiosity**. For others, deconstruction may start as a sincere search for truth and beauty.[13] This may be fueled by the local church's inability or unwillingness to approach certain subjects, forcing the person to find answers outside of her faith tradition. Theological shallowness and anti-intellectualism are harmful and should be eradicated from the local church.
3. **Cultural shock**. A person might start having "a perception that Christianity [or another faith tradition] is significantly out of touch with contemporary values."[14] This may lead them to search for moral answers elsewhere.
4. **Toxic environments**. Scot McKnight and Laura Barringer warn about *narcissistic leadership* and *power imposed by fear* being the early signs of toxic

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[12] See Swoboda, *After Doubt*, 10.
[13] Brian Zhand, *When Everything is On Fire: Faith Forged From the Ashes* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2021), 49.
[14] McGrath is referring explicitly to the subject of heresy, it is important to clarify that deconstruction does not necessarily lead to it; nevertheless, his insight is still valuable for the subject of deconstruction in general. McGrath, *Heresy*, 180.

cultures in churches.[15] Toxic leaders thrive in environments of imposition, shame, and manipulation. While toxic leaders *demonize* questioning, it must be clarified that just because a leader does not know how to handle questioning does not mean they are toxic; it may just be a matter of personal development at an intellectual or emotional level. Toxic environments are hotbeds for spiritual abuse and trauma. Once a person is aware of the toxicity and fruits of such an environment, it is only natural that they would start questioning or simply rejecting everything related to it, even the legitimate parts of Christianity that were used to manipulate the person into illegitimate behaviors and beliefs.

5. **Disappointment and pain**. Multiple reasons can trigger this factor: innocent misunderstandings within the congregation, political stances of leadership, personal sickness, or the heartbreaking pain of loss. The biblical witness shows that deep reconfiguration of faith was needed in the face of multiple faith-shattering events like the Babylonian exile or Job's experience. Latin American Pentecostal pastors should incorporate into their pastoral toolbox the wisdom found in the imprecatory Psalms, Job, Lamentations, and other similar writings that show the vulnerability of the human soul.

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[15] See chapter three of McKnight and Barringer, *A Church Called Tov: Forming a Goodness Culture That Resists Abuses of Power and Promotes Healing* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 2020).

6. **Discipleship**. Even when this may be the least cited reason for deconstruction, I believe the right discipleship process helps a person navigate through deconstruction. Mentors should heed the different causes of deconstruction and stand by the disciple's side in order to assist him or her. Furthermore, discipleship should *lead* a person to deconstruct his or her faith *within the local church*; the faith community should be a place of challenge, dialogue, and wonder; in other words, Christ-like discipleship.

The only one of these reasons that is malignant by itself is *toxic environments*; its malevolence does not spring from a person's response to it but from the evil it incubates. In this case, deconstruction may literally save a person's life. All the other reasons might be instruments used by the Spirit to bring a person to maturity and a deeper relationship with God, especially when accompanied by faithful pastoral ministry.

Conclusion, the interpretive task

Osmer shows that the reason pastors care about the interpretive task is because they understand that *wise judgment*, the practical wisdom needed at the local church, comes from the marriage between *thoughtfulness* that considers how a person

experiences something, and *theoretical interpretation* of knowledge from the sciences and the arts.[16]

Theoretical interpretation plays a key role in helping pastors deal with deconstructive experiences, but it is not enough to act wisely. All the aforementioned causes for deconstruction require a thoughtful pastoral heart that is aware of both the emotions related to these experiences and the time it takes for people to journey through processes like these. Pastors know that caring for the flock is a lifelong commitment that yields results over years, not days or months. It is tempting for Pentecostals to expect miraculous short-term results, but we must remember that the work of God on the disciples' extended long before and after Pentecost. Pastors know that sometimes the greatest miracles take time.

3.3. The Normative Task: What ought to be going on?

To engage in the normative task and define what ought to be going on, it will be helpful to have a broader vision of different existing models of pastoral theology. *The Cambridge Dictionary of Christian Theology* explains four main models of pastoral theology: the **classical-clerical** is characterized by its emphasis on the office, role, and functions of clergy as ministers of the *cura animarum* (the cure of souls); the **clinical-pastoral** sees the pastor as a trained clinician and understands pastoral care as mental

[16] Osmer, *Practical Theology*, 82-84.

health; the **communal-contextual** gives preference to the community over the individual, it sees care as communitarian in nature and understands personal distress as interconnected with socio-political conditions, which is why it is heavily influenced by contextual theologies such as liberation, feminist, and black theologies; and finally, the **intercultural-postmodern** model which uses socio-cultural analysis to deliver pastoral care, incorporating theological anthropology that celebrates differences such as gender, race, class, culture, and sexuality as opportunities for honest dialogue.[17]

Carrie Doehring finds the classical-clerical paradigm to be insufficient; its focus on "the authority of the Bible, personal commitment to Jesus, and belief in fundamental creedal statements"[18] might lead pastors to prioritize right beliefs, as generic principles, over wellbeing. She probably has in mind the clinical-pastoral paradigm when she warns us to be wary of focusing on individual healing, which is appealing because of its resonance with "modern middle-class Euro-American values: personal autonomy, individual freedom, and a belief in progress, along with a non-moralistic use of religion that focuses on self-actualization and personal growth."[19] Doehring prefers contextual and postmodern models of pastoral care that set context-specific goals; for example, *sustaining* by offering communal care in contexts that do not allow the person´s healing

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[17] Emmanuel Y. Lartey, "Pastoral Theology," in *The Cambridge Dictionary of Christian Theology*, edited by Ian A. McFarlan (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 372.
[18] Carrie Doehring, *The Practice of Pastoral Care, Revised and Expanded Edition: A Postmodern Approach* (Louisville, KY: Presbyterian Publishing Corporation, 2015), xx.
[19] Ibid., xix.

to be fully realized (proposed by African American pastoral theologians), or *survival* (suggested by feminist pastoral theologians).

These four approaches to pastoral theology are not necessarily exclusive. Willimon sees the ancient *cura animarum* of the classical-clerical paradigm as a critique of secular therapy whose goal is self-fulfillment: "the gospel is a critique of our needs, an attempt to give us needs worth having."[20] From the same standpoint, he understands pastoral care as communal edification that is highly contextualized because it takes place in the community of believers. But of course, the focus one chooses will shape the pastoral work with a person and a community.

The pastor should be mindful of the heavy Western influences found in the classical-clerical and clinical pastoral models. Of course, it would be naïve to assume the communal-contextual and intercultural-postmodern are unpolluted from foreign influences. The value found in these last two models is the focus on location that helps pastors better address specific needs in the community of faith. Now, if other Christian communities around the world have found value in any of these four models, Latin American pastors should be open to learn with a critical mind and to contribute with their own findings from the local context.

Doehring suggests the work of pastoral care theologians should differentiate between *life-giving* and *life-limiting* beliefs, values, and coping mechanisms. Contextual

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[20] Willimon, *Pastor*, 95-96.

goals in pastoral ministry should embody compassion that addresses life-limiting theologies of fear and shame and is sustained by personal and communal spiritual practices.[21] A pastor who is walking with a believer through a deconstruction process will find herself helping them distinguish between these life-giving and life-limiting beliefs. Doehring suggests the use of Pargament's spiritual orienting systems[22] to help us define what is life-giving or not; the following criteria should be met:

1. **Differentiation of Meaning-Making**. Are religious and theological beliefs owned by the person? Can they fully articulate them? Do these beliefs help the person transform distress into "empathic concern and compassion where love propels care seekers to reach out rather than withdraw"?[23]
2. **Integration and Flexibility.** Refers to the integration of spiritual practices that produce love, joy, contentment, and similar emotions. Integrating these practices and emotions to daily life should provide flexibility that makes a difference in how the person deals with moments of suffering, fear and similar emotions. Fragmentation and inflexibility show life-limiting beliefs.[24]
3. **Beliefs and Spiritual Practices Related to Benevolence and Goodness.** The last criterion explores if a person's spiritual practices help her experience the

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[21] Doehring, *The Practice of Pastoral Care*, xx.
[22] See Kenneth Pargament, Kavita M. Desai, and Kelly M. McConnell, "Spirituality: A Pathway to Posttraumatic Growth or Decline?" In *Handbook of Posttraumatic Growth: Research and Practice*, edited by Lawrence G. Calhoun and Richard G. Tedeschi (Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum, 2006), 121– 35.
[23] Doehring, *The Practice of Pastoral Care*, 91.
[24] Ibid., 92.

> goodness of God as respect, trust, and compassion with themselves, others, and God. A life-giving theology is a lived theology that connects people with the goodness of God through different means.[25]

This pastoral work is to be done by using what Doehring calls a trifocal lens that considers a *precritical focus* that understands that the sacred can be glimpsed, apprehended, and expressed through sacred texts; a *modern focus* that reflects on rational and empirical methods like critical interpretation and social sciences; and a *postmodern focus* which understands the contextual and provisional nature of knowledge, even knowledge about God.[26] A skilled pastor should learn to move between the different focal points and find ways in which each one complements the others.

The balance between sensibility and critical thinking found in this approach can make a great difference when pastoring Pentecostal believers. Castelo and Castelo show the importance of a similar methodology when they address the subject of how to care for the mystical soul of a Pentecostal.

> The mystical sensibilities within Pentecostalism are precious and worth lifting up; however, they are also precarious and so require intentional care and stewardship. . . . The mystical sensibilities of Pentecostalism thrive when things are running smoothly and people

[25] Ibid., 93.
[26] Ibid., xxv.

> claim deliverance, see miracles happen, and generally feel like God is at work and doing something on their behalf. However, when things break down, when people are bound in cycles of sin and self-destruction, and when miracles do not happen despite the steady prayers of the faithful over years of tarrying, what then? Pentecostals at such points have a much harder time living into their spirituality with confidence and, as a result, may significantly struggle. Some may even leave the Christian faith altogether.[27]

Three recommendations are to be considered when caring for Pentecostals. First, "that the intimate relationship between the mystic and God ought to be affirmed throughout the process of care. For the mystic, God represents. . . a 'safe haven'. . . . Western contexts tend to pathologize dependency, whereas attachment theory sees it as complementary to autonomy."[28] The security found in God orients a person towards vulnerability, honesty, and acceptance, thereby making them resilient people. Second, the pastor must work out of the apophatic conviction "that the Spirit is constantly at work, whether the carer or the cared see it or not."[29] And third, by realizing that "caring

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[27] Daniel Castelo and Kimberly G. Castelo, "Caring for Contemporary Mystics: Pentecostalism and the Mystical Worldview," *Journal of Spiritual Formation & Soul Care,* 2020, 13 (1), 109.
[28] Ibid., 110.
[29] Ibid., 112.

for contemporary mystics involves stepping into another kind of world,"[30] the pastor or caretaker will deal with mystic souls in careful and generous manners.

Conclusion, the normative task

By bringing all these factors together, Latin American Pentecostal pastors would be able to truthfully engage in the pastoral normative task by *prophetically discerning good pastoral practices* that foster not only life-giving theologies, but life-giving deconstructive processes. Prophetic discernment brings together sympathy (which is the participation in God's pathos, his suffering over the life experiences of his people), and theological and ethical interpretation.[31]

3.4. The Pragmatic Task: How might we respond?

With these thoughts in mind, we now go back to the ancient prophecy found in Isaiah and the first letter written by the apostle Paul to the church in Corinth. The input received by these sources will allow us to draw out a pastoral approach to communities going through deconstructive processes.

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[30] Ibid., 114.
[31] Osmer, *Practical Theology*, 136.

3.4.1. The Promise for the Community in Isaiah

As we saw earlier, Caputo traces back Derrida's term *déconstruction* to the prophet Isaiah's declaration: "so once again I will do things that shock and amaze them, and I will destroy the wisdom of those who claim to know and understand."[32] God is warning his people that he is about to tear down the thought structures that give them confidence, because these are unable to provide the assurance they attribute to them. In their dullness they are missing "the wonderful and marvelous actions of God."[33] So the Lord is about to destroy and renew their faith. This *divine destruction* has affinities to the idea we now know as deconstruction of faith.

Seitz points out that "the shapers of the Isaiah traditions have worked with the overwhelming conviction that God's word to Israel in the past was uttered to instruct the present and future generations."[34] We can conclude that at some point, someone constructed something over the word uttered by God that needed to be destroyed and made new for the people of God to enjoy the benefits of God's promises.

The Lord's everlasting faithfulness leads him to provide for his people whatever is necessary to help them face the challenge of the destruction and renewal of their faith. To them, God promises the care of a shepherd, "the Lord cares for his nation, just as

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[32] Isaiah 29.14 CEV
[33] Christopher R. Seitz, *Isaiah 1-39*. Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 1993), 215.
[34] Seitz, 18.

shepherds care for their flocks. He carries the lambs in his arms, while gently leading the mother sheep."[35] Even when the book is a "collage" of different messages for different occasions, it was arranged as one book; as such, "there is something to learn from the total arrangement."[36] This means that even when the challenge and the promise are in different sections, the fact that tradition has treated it as one coherent message allows us to find a relationship between God's challenge and his promise to his people.

According to John Goldingay, one of the main problems the Isaiah community faced was that their leaders made alliances with death by sincerely treating false promises as certain refuges. They claimed to be devoted, but their strategies did not include God. The sincerity of their mistakes did not free them from the consequences of hurting the people of God, because they lived as if they wanted the voice of YHWH to be silenced.[37] This is the reason God himself caused the destruction of their wisdom so that the divine wisdom could be manifested.

In the language of the Hebrew Bible, leaders were referred to as shepherds. In this context sheep could be lost either by being abandoned or by wandering away. When we address the topic of deconstruction of faith, it is usually assumed that the sheep are wandering away, which of course could be the case: people often deconstruct their way out of faith in Christ. But one should never forget that the problem that the sheep in

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[35] Isaiah 40.11 CEV.
[36] John Goldingay, *The Theology of the Book of Isaiah* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2014), 11-12.
[37] Goldingay, *The Theology of the Book of Isaiah*, 54-55.

Isaiah faced involved abandonment by their leaders.[38] In the context of deconstructive experiences, pastors abandon their congregation when they dismiss their doubts, ignore the negative effects of certain theologies, fail to walk beside them in difficult seasons, or even when they preach defensively, aggressively, or lightly.

The Isaiah community lost "nearly all of those structures and institutions which [gave] identity to community."[39] This threw them into a pit of hopelessness and despair where questioning God's goodness and love was a logical reaction. It is in this context in which the powerful image of the shepherd is introduced to reassure God's people that their protector and sustainer was still present.[40] In fact, such is the power of this promise that this passage was incorporated by the ancient church as an Advent lection, showing a God who enters "into the confusion of human affairs."[41] A deconstructing people needs a present shepherd who enters into the confusion surrounding the congregation to care, sometimes even carry, and always gently leading.

From the Christian perspective, the motif of Messiah as shepherd is most fully developed in the gospel of John where the Good Shepherd is contrasted to a thief or a stranger. Here the shepherd "is the means by which God blesses and protects his

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[38] D. H. Johnson, "Shepherd, Sheep," in *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1992), 751.
[39] Paul D. Hanson, *Isaiah 40-66*. Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 1995), 14.
[40] Hanson, 24-25.
[41] Hanson, 32.

people."[42] Gerard Sloyan underlines the Christological importance of this passage in showing "the unparalleled intimacy between Jesus and the Father and the effect of his laying down his life freely for his sheep."[43] The text clearly makes claims that cannot be made of any other shepherd but Christ, especially when one realizes the political overtones of the text, which stretch further than our modern ideas of pastoral care. In Sloyan's view the use of the word καλός[44] points to Jesus' role as "the human repository of all the powers and functions of Israel's Lord."[45] He also warns about the dangers of pastors who might "identify themselves with the 'noble shepherd' at all points,"[46] a temptation that has led preachers in the past to lightly assume the position of a good shepherd while conveniently placing their "opponents" in the position of thieves and robbers.

This warning reminds us to fight the temptation of finding a human equivalent for all of the Good Shepherd's characteristics. Nevertheless, before the Gospel of John is finished, in chapter 21, the metaphor of the shepherd is applied to the disciples by Jesus himself, pointing us to believe that the Good Shepherd has discipled good shepherds to carry on his work.[47] In fact, others think that the use of καλός instead of the alternative

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[42] Johnson, "Shepherd, Sheep," 752.
[43] Gerard Sloyan, *John*, Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching (Atlanta, Georgia: John Knox Press, 1988), 139.
[44] Not only beautiful and delightful, but noble.
[45] Sloyan, *John*, 128.
[46] Sloyan, *John*, 130.
[47] Johnson, "Shepherd, Sheep," 753.

ἀγαθός, a word that describes something supremely righteous, points to the divine invitation to imitate Christ.[48]

One needs to heed Sloyan's warning without omitting the fact that the teaching of the Good Shepherd originates from a controversy between Jesus and the Pharisees; it is in this context in which Jesus contrasts a good shepherd against "thieves and wolves." When Paul uses the image of a shepherd to refer to church leadership, he also warns about the presence of vicious wolves who are people who pervert the truth, do not spare the flock, and draw disciples away.[49] Peter, the one called by the Lord himself to tend his sheep in John 21, uses the same shepherd metaphor to refer to the elders of the church while also mentioning a roaring lion who brings suffering.[50]

Gunther recognizes several characteristics attributed to the Good Shepherd throughout John's Gospel, but he finds the emphasis from a pastoral point of view is in the shepherd's heart motivation, more than his leadership tactics.[51] As pastors, we crave for the safety of tactics, but these do not necessarily apply in different contexts. A pastoral heart, on the other hand, is always required and will work in any context, faithfully striving to find tactics for the specific reality of the local church.

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[48] Nathan H. Gunter, *"For the Flock: Impetus for Shepherd Leadership in John 10,"* In *The Journal of Applied Christian Leadership 10*, no. 1 (Spr 2016), 10-11.
[49] Acts 20.28-31 NET
[50] 1 Peter 5.1-11 NET
[51] Gunther, "For the Flock: Impetus for Shepherd Leadership in John 10," 9.

A pastoral heart is of upmost relevance when encountering the challenges presented by deconstruction of faith. Some of these challenges have to do with diversity in beliefs, the relational aspect of faith, and finding a purpose behind divine destruction and renewal of faith.

3.4.1.1. The challenge of diversity in beliefs

One of the challenges pastors deal with is the broad range of beliefs a person can have, even amongst Christian faith. The most extreme deviations from Christian faith are called heresies. In fact, Rhyne R. Putman wisely emphasizes such a term does not apply to "every interpretive mistake or error."[52] He considers the label "heresy" only applies to those beliefs or teachings that amount to the abandonment of faith. McGrath finds that heresy formulates core Christian beliefs in ways that can be not only inadequate, but even destructive; nevertheless, he believes between orthodoxy and heresy there "lies a penumbra of views."[53] Some evangelical thinkers are quick to brand as heresy any form of deconstruction, but many times they fail to consider that, more than there being a penumbra of views between both extremes, orthodoxy itself is quite generous and more diverse than many seem to recognize.

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[52] Putman, *When Doctrine Divides the People of God*, 206.
[53] McGrath, *Heresy*, 12.

Even if we consider a belief as heretical, McGrath finds "no real grounds for supposing that heresy was the outcome of malevolent and arrogant apostates plotting to destroy Christianity,"[54] despite what some early Christian writers asserted and what many anti-deconstructionists allege today. Even if a belief is found to be destructive, this does not mean the person proposing it has malevolent intentions. Such distinction directly impacts how a pastor addresses a situation.

A pastoral heart is aware of the existence of false teachers, inside and outside the church. However, pastors remember that not every differing idea or question is ill-intended. A pastoral heart is open to dialogue and even to some level of challenge, always assuming people have honest intentions until proven otherwise. Pastors know they can be wrong and understand there is plenty of room in orthodoxy for differing opinions, which is why they are committed to continuous personal growth that allows them to identify generous theological areas, as well as unnegotiable arenas. Ministry teams will also prove helpful for pastors to welcome a diversity of opinions to enrich their work.

Putman clarifies that doctrinal disagreements come from different sources: we read imperfectly, we read differently, we reason differently, we feel differently, and we have different biases. He suggests that when we come in contact with divergent readings we should start first by assessing if there really is a disagreement at all and not

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[54] Ibid., 175.

a simple matter of differing semantics. For Putman, sometimes we just use different concepts to portray the same idea (e.g., Nicaea's metaphysics differ from Paul's language but attempt to portray the same ideas), or read the same text within different contexts.[55] If we find there is an actual disagreement, we must approach it with epistemic virtue: "curiosity, intellectual honesty, teachability, patience, discernment, creativity, and wisdom."[56] Then we should consider who is in a better interpretive position. If we are not the ones in the best interpretive position, we must decide whether to adopt the opposing stance or suspend our judgement temporarily until we can be better informed.[57] Pastors many times fall in the trap of people's expectations: they come with questions, pastors should have answers. But pastors in contemporary times must understand they simply cannot be informed about everything. Sometimes the best pastoral answer is "I do not know" or "I am not sure;" a pastoral heart is more interested in the flock's health than in nurturing a false ego.

In fact, pastors recognize the wolf metaphor is applied to leaders. In the communities represented in Isaiah and John, the problem was located within the institutionalized leadership; therefore, pastors should never be quick to assume it is others who are the problem. A pastoral heart is aware that even "sound doctrine" driven

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[55] Putman, 179-182. For this section of his work, Putman uses Bryan Frances as one of his primary sources, Frances, *Disagreement* (Malden, MA: Polity, 2014).
[56] Ibid., 187.
[57] Ibid., 193.

by an unhealthy ego can be more damaging than false teaching because the harm it causes will distance the sheep from further seeking the truth in the church context.

Dealing with a plethora of interpretations is something pastors should make peace with. McGrath states that if Scripture holds the highest authority, Protestantism "is obliged to recognize that multiple interpretations of Scripture will ensue, with no authorized means of determining which is 'orthodox' and which 'heretical.' This difficulty can be alleviated, but not resolved."[58] Here lies the importance of tradition, an inheritance which Latin American Pentecostalism has neglected because of its anti-Roman Catholic sentiments.[59] If the Spirit is as powerful as Pentecostalism preaches, then we must humbly recognize he has never stopped moving among his Church. Tradition can be Spirit-infused. Creedal faith formation must be reclaimed at local Latin American Pentecostal churches.

The Pentecostal theologian James K. A. Smith denounces that the postmodern idea of a "religion without the religion" is nothing but a continuation of modern sensibilities that seek the assurance of knowing before venturing into believing. The church, in contrast, understands it deals with the realm of mysteries and responds with faith: "the proclamation and adoption of 'thick' confessional identities. . . . [A] Radical

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[58] McGrath, *Heresy*, 217.

[59] On a personal note, while growing up in a Latin American Pentecostal church I was never taught a single creed. I realize this may sound unbelievable to most people from other traditions. The contents of the creeds were something one absorbed through general formation, but not explicitly learned as a formula.

Orthodoxy."[60] I dare to speak from my experience when I say new generations of Latin American Pentecostals are deconstructing their faith in search of these thick confessional identities, identities they are unable to find in their local churches.

Of course, this does not completely resolve the matter of differing interpretations but provides a "playing field" for healthy faith exploration. Pastors are the ones responsible for the task of proving that orthodoxy can be "imaginatively compelling, emotionally engaging, aesthetically enhancing, and personally liberating" [61] in the local church context.

3.4.1.2. The challenge of relational faith

A second challenge pastors deal with, is the relational nature of faith. Suspicious postures assume the creeds are the result of power games won by an elite that sought to crush dissenting ideas, but these really should be understood as the result of a productive conflict that seriously weighted all available options. The resulting creeds represent the *consensus fidelium*, the consensus of the faithful.[62] The Bible attests about itself that it is a book written by a community of faith, for a community of faith; Christian faith rightly understood can never be individualistic. While belief is cognitive, faith is relational in nature. Faith is primarily about "trust, commitment, and love. . . .

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[60] James K.A. Smith, *Who's Afraid of Postmodernism: Taking Derrida, Lyotard, and Foucault to Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2006), 117.
[61] McGrath, *Heresy,* 234.
[62] McGrath, *Heresy,* 27-28.

[While] Beliefs [embodied by creeds] represent an attempt to put into words the substance of that faith."[63]

The relational nature of truth is stressed by Downing, "the most significant postmodern thinkers acknowledge that truth is relational as well: it is perceived through the beliefs, values and practices of the community."[64] To think that humans are able to live without external, social determination is nothing but a modern myth. Willimon points us to the reality that it is not a matter of *if* we are determined by a community of interpretation but *which* community of interpretation we are allowing to determine our lives.[65] His warning to pastoral leaders who are dealing with questions about their faith is noteworthy and relevant:

> It is fair to have a lover's quarrel with the tradition of the church, to wrestle with and to question which tradition is sanctioned by God and which is spurious irrelevancy. Yet it is not fair to place oneself or one's culture above the story of Jesus of Nazareth as represented in the creeds, councils, and faith of the church.[66]

Pastors develop deep relationships with the Good Shepherd and his flock, both the immediate manifestation of this flock in the local church as well as the historical

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[63] Ibid., 22.
[64] Downing, *How Postmodernism Serves (My) Faith*, 206.
[65] William Willimon, *Pastor: The Theology and Practice of Ordained Ministry* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2016), 19-20.
[66] Willimon, *Pastor*, 22.

flock over which other ministers have presided. Nurturing these contemporary and historical relationships sustains ministry.

3.4.1.3. The purpose behind divine destruction

In my opinion, there is a difference between *divine deconstruction and renewal of faith* and other kinds of deconstruction of faith. Isaiah 29.13 shows the destruction God is bringing to his people's wisdom and thought structures comes with the explicit purpose of drawing their hearts closer to him. This distinction is important because some kinds of deconstruction *can* produce the opposite effect: draw people away from God.[67]

Look at Peter's experience long before coming to the house of Cornelius, while he was still walking with the incarnated Christ. As the crucifixion approached, Jesus announced some startling news to his disciples: "Simon, Simon, pay attention! Satan has demanded to have you all, to sift you like wheat, but I have prayed for you, Simon, that your faith may not fail. When you have turned back, strengthen your brothers."[68] Simon's faith was about to be torn to the ground. What is astounding about this announcement is that the agent this time was not the Holy Spirit but Satan. Even more shocking is the fact that God allowed it. Jesus' warning shows this event was very serious, Peter's faith could in fact fail, and all Jesus could do was pray. Nevertheless, if

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[67] Deconstruction of faith can also lead people away from the church body, while they are still earnestly seeking for God.
[68] Luke 22.31-32

Peter did come back after going through this soul crushing experience, he would be in the position of strengthening other people's faith.

A couple of lessons come to mind when reading this passage.

1. **Trust and Patience.** Deconstruction of faith has a mystery to it. There are times in which people need to be left alone to face the mystery. The only way for a pastor to know when to step back and when to insist is by cultivating a sensibility to the voice of the Spirit and a meaningful relationship with the person going through deconstruction. Swoboda warns that patient reflection is so uncomfortable that we sacrifice it at the altar of quick fixes and responses, and when we do "we assume a compassionate God is obliged to alleviate suffering instantaneously,"[69] so we do the same when helping others by hastily giving them memorized responses. But the author reminds us how Jesus did not deal with Thomas's doubts until a week later. Even more important, during that time of doubt the apostle was still a significant part of the community of faith.
2. **Prayer and second chances.** Pastors acknowledge that not everything is solved by a sermon and very little is accomplished by asserting one's authority, yet they understand a prayerful pastoral heart can accomplish great victories. A heart like this prepares a leader to welcome back someone

[69] Swoboda, *After Doubt*, 113.

into the community of disciples, not only without judgement, but even encouraging them to continue walking into God-given purposes stronger than ever. God honors a pastoral heart.

3. **God's redeeming power.** Not every deconstructive process might be led by the Spirit, but even those events led by the adversary can yield fruit for the kingdom of God.

God leads his people into destruction and renewal of their faith with the main purpose of drawing them closer to him; he did it to the community found in Isaiah, but also to the community in Corinth.

3.4.2 The Blessings for the Community in Corinth

The second instance in which God states he is going to destroy and renew human wisdom can be found in the first letter to the church in Corinth: "As God says in the Scriptures, 'I will destroy the wisdom of all who claim to be wise. I will confuse those who think they know so much'."[70]

This citation is one of "the twin pillars upon which Paul's exposition is being constructed [verses 1.19 and 1.31] . . . taken from passages that depict God as one who

[70] 1 Corinthians 1.19 CEV

acts to judge and save his people in ways that defy human expectation."[71] These are used in a context in which fascination with leadership skills and knowledge started breaking the community into different factions. It must be noted that such leaders did possess outstanding skills and knowledge, yet the attitudes springing from the community in Corinth did not necessarily reflect the behavior modeled by the leaders these factions were formed after, such as Paul, Cephas, and Apollos. There was even a Christ-faction: people probably claiming to be the real followers of Christ while simultaneously failing to reflect the attitudes of Christ. The Spirit-filled, tongues-speaking Corinthian community was in urgent need of a deconstructive work by the Spirit that allowed the body to be healed by God's saving actions.

The mention of what Jews and Greeks are after is used to represent not only what the Corinthian church was admiring, but these served to epitomize "the basic idolatries of humanity. . . . For both of these the ultimate idolatry is that of insisting that God conform to our own prior views as to how 'the God who makes sense' ought to do things."[72] As a response to these idolatries in the Corinthian church, the cross is presented as an epistemological revolution, one that introduced a paradoxical worldview in which the greatest power and wisdom the world has ever encountered

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[71] Richard B. Hays, *First Corinthians*, Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 1997), 26.
[72] Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians Revised* Edition, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2014), 77.

was shown through the weakness and folly of a cross.[73] Only the cross could tear down the gods raised up by human wisdom, gods that were nothing but "a projection of human fallenness and a source of human pride. . . [gods that made] considerable demands on the ability of people to understand them. . . [becoming] gods only for the elite and 'deserving.' "[74]

The cross was the unequivocal fulfillment of the promise of divine destruction of our human wisdom and expectations. The Scriptures were the place this promise was found. Paul introduces the words of Isaiah with the use of his absolute γέγραπται, a formula he uses exclusively to refer to the Hebrew Bible, "for Paul to say 'for it is written' is sufficient argument."[75] Thiselton quotes Ulrich Luz at this point, "for Paul, the OT is not in the first place something to understand, but it itself creates understanding."[76] Divine destruction and renewal of faith for the Corinthian church happens when the Scriptures are taken seriously and used to interpret God's saving actions.

The destruction the Corinthian church is facing is explained by Thiselton, "God chose to reverse what was perceived as wise in an event which appeared to consist in weakness and failure, but would lead in the longer term to new beginnings and to a

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[73] Hays, *First Corinthians*, 27.
[74] Ibid., 76.
[75] Ibid., 72.
[76] Anthony C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians,* The New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2000), 160. He cites from Luz, *Das Geschichtsverständis des Paulus* (Munich: Kaiser, 1968), 134.

chastened, transformed, people."[77] This is a great description of how many believers experience deconstruction, what appeared to be a failure caused by weak faith, ends up being a transformational new beginning.

For a community about to experience a new beginning by God's transformational work, the Lord provided several blessings.

3.4.2.1. The blessing of a pastoral heart

The Corinthian correspondence exhibits Paul's pastoral heart. It is easy to think about the apostle as a great theologian, but his letters are explicitly pastoral, even when Paul never applies such a title to himself.[78] The term "pastor" occurs but once in the *Corpus Paulinum*.[79]

In reading 2 Corinthians 11, we realize it is Paul's pastoral heart towards the church in Corinth that makes him endure the hardships of ministry and what ultimately proves his apostleship. The authority to speak over the lives of the Corinthian church does not come simply from position, but from a *proven* pastoral heart. This heart is put in stark contrast to a false apostle's heart, an image that comes close to that of the wolf and the thief. A few aspects that prove a pastoral heart are devoted presence, personal

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[77] Ibid., 161.
[78] M. J. Wilkins, "Pastoral Theology," *Dictionary of Latter New Testament and Its Developments* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1997), 877.
[79] P. Beasley-Murray, 'Pastor, Paul as,' Dictionary of Paul and His Letters (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 654.

sacrifice, commitment, attention, patience, and time. A false pastoral heart, a wolf-heart, would exhibit the opposite attitudes.

One of the key factors of having a pastoral heart is the way in which ministry is exercised. Beasley-Murray notes how Paul's tone becomes parental when he writes about Onesimus or to the Corinthian church, something he avoids when writing to Rome or Colossae, churches he did not establish. The parent-child metaphor was widely used in the ancient world to describe a master-disciple relationship. Paul presents himself both as mother and father,[80] calling his children to imitate him, not as act of arrogance, but because of a close pastoral relationship that involved encouragement and discipline. It is dangerous to mistake the parent-child metaphor of leadership as an excuse to infantilize believers. By doing so we run the risk of becoming authoritarian tyrants or micro-managers of the flock. None of these postures reflect the character of the Good Shepherd. On the contrary, Paul limited his own authority to appealing and encouraging instead of commanding. His pastoral heart taught the churches how to make their own decisions by giving them space, time, and arguments; this is the kind of leadership God provides for a community facing a divine destruction and renewal of their faith.[81]

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[80] 1 Thessalonians 2.7-8; Galatians 4.19-20; 1 Corinthians 3.1-3; 1 Thessalonians 2.11-12; 1 Corinthians 4.14-21.
[81] Some examples cited by Beasly-Murray showing Paul's non-authoritative style are Romans 12.1; 15.30; 16.7; 1 Corinthians 1.10; 4.16; 16.16; Ephesians 4.1; 1 Thessalonians 2.11. Beasley-Murray, 'Pastor, Paul as,' 654-657.

We can see why it would be a mistake to sever a relationship with this kind of leader. Even so, the Corinthian church was favoring the many voices of other teachers.[82] A leader who fears she is losing a person's heart to dangerous voices might be tempted to assume an authoritative role over a person's life, but it would only make things worse. Paul presents us with a wise approach that requires the patience of a pastor, not the results or strategies of a manager.

3.4.2.2. The blessing of mystery

The second blessing God provided for the community of Corinth was the gift of mystery, but not in the way they expected it. Senkbeil claims the core of pastoral character or temperament (*habitus*) revolves around mystery, i.e., stewarding the central mystery of God, which is Jesus. In his opinion, if our ministry revolves around the idea of a spiritual message, we betray our calling by becoming salesmen for the gospel, "always scrambling to persuade reluctant customers to buy our product, rather than serving as emissaries sent by God to issue his perennial joyous invitation toward genuine freedom and release: 'Repent and believe the good news' (Mark 1:15)."[83] Senkbeil defines mystery as "something beyond the reach of human sensory perception

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[82] 1 Cor 4.15

[83] Harold L. Senkbeil, *The Care of Souls: Cultivating a Pastor's Heart* (Ashland: Lexham Press, 2019), 29.

and intellect,"[84] but through Christ, the inaccessible mystery that is God revealed itself to humanity. Hence Paul's understanding of ministry is explained to the Corinthians as those who are "servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God."[85]

Thiselton acknowledges two problems regarding the word mystery. For modern readers, "*mystery* tends to convey what is impenetrable not because it necessitates revelation but because it can never in principle become coherent or intelligible… [while for those Corinthians seduced by the appeal of mystery religions] the word would signify a knowledge shared exclusively by 'insiders'."[86] Neither the modern nor the Corinthian concept of mystery is what Paul intends; he explains to the Corinthians that God's wisdom is the revealed mystery of the crucified Christ: "God's wisdom is not some inaccessible teaching spoken in secret . . . 'mystery' ordinarily refers to something formerly hidden in God from *all* human eyes but now revealed in history through Christ and made understandable to his people through the Spirit."[87]

Zhand calls the church to approach faith with the perspective of a mystic, who is "a person who seeks and at some level attains *a direct experience within the mystery of God*."[88] Following this definition some mystics found in the Bible would be Abraham, Jacob, Moses, David, Elijah, Mary the Mother of Jesus, Peter, John, Mary Magdalene, and

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[84] Senkbeil, *The Care of Souls*, 20.
[85] 1 Cor 4:1 NET
[86] Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 241.
[87] Fee, *The Fist Epistle to the Corinthians*, 112.
[88] Zhand, *When Everything's On Fire*, 125.

Paul.[89] From a Pentecostal perspective, all these examples and the promise of Pentecost in which the Spirit filled everyone at the upper-room means that every believer is invited into the life of a mystic, into the revealed mysteries of God.

Now, a mystery revealed is not a tamed enigma. The problem with some of the Corinthian believers was their attitude of superiority which led them to consider the message of the cross as milk for infants, while they longed for the deeper mysteries fit for the mature.[90] This mature/infant imagery may sound similar to Paul's parent/child metaphor, but the way some of the Corinthians were using it differed greatly from Paul's use: it lacked love. Those deemed by the Corinthians as novices were treated in a derogatory manner. Therefore, the apostle uses the "strategy of ironic reversal," using their own language against them in the first chapters of the letter, as a way to call the Corinthians back to the wisdom of the cross.[91]

Pastors are stewards of the biggest mysteries in creation: faith, hope, forgiveness, love, redemption, and many others. Yes, the great mystery of God has been revealed through Jesus, but pastors understand mysteries demand one to approach them with supreme reverence, in fear and trembling because "Scripture beckons us toward a world where there is mystery; something is afoot that cannot be contained within our systems

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[89] Zhand, *When Everything's On Fire*, 129-130.
[90] Fee, *The Fist Epistle to the Corinthians*, 109.
[91] Hays, *First Corinthians*, 41-42.

of knowledge. . . scripture engenders interpretive humility."[92] Humility, born out of love and wonder, is the result of encountering the mystery of a crucified Lord. A humble heart is a prerequisite for something as marvelous as pastoral ministry.

3.4.2.3. The blessing of wise and loving boundary setting

Another blessing God provides to the Corinthian community in need of destruction and renewal of faith, is boundaries. Interestingly, the Corinthian church did not have any problems setting boundaries among themselves: they made clear distinctions between the mature and the novice, those of Paul and those of Apollos, and those who had food and those who lacked it. But they had serious problems setting boundaries between their faith identity and the world around them. The same can happen in communities where deconstruction of faith is taking place. Divisive lines can be drawn between those who are deconstructing and those who are not. These limits can be put in place either by those deconstructing or by those who are not. In some instances, the church has assumed such a defensive attitude towards the world that people who are deconstructing overreact to restrictive rules by completely blurring important limits.

Early Christian communities were searching for boundaries through open dialogue and by sharing foundational documents, but the expansion of the faith and an

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[92] Willimon, *Pastor*, 117.

increasingly antagonistic environment led to a point in which these "communities were simply not in the position to enforce conformity."[93] This led to uncertainty about which resources should be regarded as authoritative, divergent interpretations, and a diversity of worship patterns appeared. However, "the sociological diversity of early Christianity was not matched by anything even remotely approaching theological anarchy,"[94] and as soon as it was possible, the church elaborated formal doctrinal statements to preserve "the central mysteries at the heart of the Christian faith and life while allowing them to be examined and explored in depth."[95]

Deconstruction resists the idea of boundaries because of their tendency to isolate and harm others. This is something that certainly needs to be avoided, especially in the church context, yet the reality is that every human organization requires boundaries to ensure survival otherwise it would die by dissolution. But boundaries can also kill by isolation, by completely cutting an organization away from the surrounding culture, hence making it irrelevant and cult-like.

In *The Boundaryless Organization* the authors propose a solution to this challenge by comparing organizations not to lifeless and rigid constructions but to living and adapting organisms. Cells need structure and protection, but if they isolate themselves completely from the surrounding context, they die by the lack of oxygen and nutrients.

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[93] McGrath, *Heresy*, 44.
[94] Ibid., 45-46.
[95] Ibid., 29.

Nature solved this problem with a divine idea: membranes. Membranes provide the cell with definition and protection, but because they are *permeable*, they allow the cell to access vital nutrients and oxygen. For human organizations "the challenge is to find the right balance, to determine how permeable to make boundaries and where to place them."[96]

The apostle Paul shows how this permeability is exercised through the interaction of *wisdom* and *love*, not through fixed policies. He clearly condemns the actions of the church member who is having an improper relationship with his stepmother; he also reprehends the use the church has been giving to the arbitration system of pagan magistrates; but he also allows for permeability, "for certain crossing of boundaries, and in both directions."[97] Examples of this approach include allowing a wife to live with an unbelieving husband or to divorce him, welcoming outsiders into the Christian assembly, and believers being able to accept dinner invitations from unbelievers even if it involved eating something that was dedicated to an idol.

This permeability is displayed in Paul's impressive pastoral ability. Even when he is dealing with sensitive issues, he plainly distinguishes between commands,

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[96] Ron Ashkenas, Dave Ulrich, Todd Jick, and Steve Kerr. *The Boundaryless Organization: Breaking the Chains of Organizational Structure* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2002), 3-4.
[97] Victor Paul Furnish, *The Theology of the First Letter to the Corinthians*, New Testament Theology (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 52-53.

concessions, and personal opinions.[98] Healthy leadership is always aware of such distinctions, while understanding healthy boundaries are permeable.

Faith leaders have the tendency of paying more attention to the clarity of a boundary than to its healthiness. Some helpful parameters to consider in setting healthy boundaries are:

3.4.2.3.1. Centered Set Church

In setting healthy boundaries, the work of theologian Mark Baker can be very helpful. He is no stranger to the challenge boundary making presents for faith communities: he brings together his experience as a missionary in Tegucigalpa, Honduras, with Paul Hiebert's approach on bounded and centered sets to differentiate between bounded churches, fuzzy churches, and centered churches.[99]

Bounded churches. Bounded churches are those which draw lines to differentiate outsiders from insiders. The line divides correct beliefs and behaviors from incorrect ones. Those who do not meet certain criteria are excluded, which yields feelings of inferiority, while insiders tend to be self-righteous. The problem is not in having clear boundaries itself; the issue is that these boundaries are enforced by shaming and excluding.

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[98] 1 Cor 7.6, 25

[99] Mark D. Baker, *Centered-Set Church: Discipleship and Community Without Judgmentalism* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2021) 19-41. See Hiebert, *Anthropological Reflections on Missiological Issues* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 1994), 107-136.

Figure 3 Bounded Churches

Fuzzy churches. Fuzzy churches solve the line-drawing problem by completely erasing the lines. This approach resonates with postmodern sensibilities that champion tolerance as a supreme virtue. Distinction is vague, and membership cannot be clearly established. Even when there is much talk about love, this is superficial since truth is sacrificed at the altar of tolerance. The center ends up being the individualistic self, and lives drift aimlessly in relativism. Instead of experiencing faithful pastoral ministry, people are neglected by the pastor's lack of clarity, because of the minister's fear of hurting their feelings.

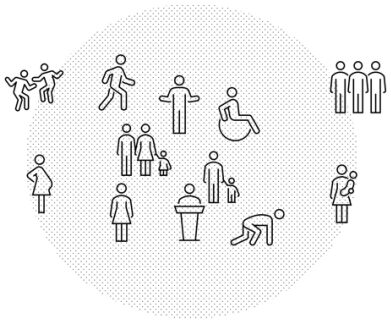

Figure 4 Fuzzy Churches

Centered churches. Unlike fuzzy churches, centered churches can distinguish who is part of the community by putting God at the center and understanding conversion as movement. These churches are more interested in the direction in which a person's life is moving relative to Christ, regardless of how close to the center a person might be. Centered churches are conscious of the fact that every individual moves at a different pace someone at the margins might be moving faster towards the center than a person who is closer to the center.

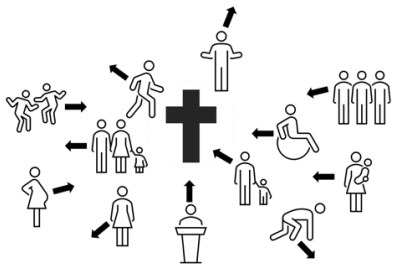

Figure 5 Centered churches

The centered church is an attempt to hold high expectations for a discipleship process while simultaneously allowing for high inclusivity. The center, of course, is a construction constituted by the community's understanding of the biblical text, models of discipleship, and the theological traditions that define the community. From a post-modern perspective, defining the center is valid since "truth is situated in contexts,"[100] i.e., within a community's perspective. Furthermore, it is logical that "every movement based on core ideas or values has to determine its center on the one hand and its

[100] Downing, *How Postmodernism Serves (My) Faith*, 220.

boundaries on the other. What is the focus of the movement? And what are the limits of diversity within the movement?"[101]

The centered church model has its limitations, as any model does. Applying it does not automatically eradicate a bounded church mentality, nor does it guarantee freedom from the challenge of people's sensibilities. Nevertheless, it can be very useful for a church that is genuinely working to find new approaches to faithful ministry in their context.

3.4.2.3.2. Doctrinal taxonomies

To avoid falling into theological minimalism (fuzzy churches) and theological maximalism (bounded churches), Putman suggests the use of doctrinal taxonomies, the sorting or ranking of doctrinal beliefs. This is an attempt to follow the wisdom found in the adage *in necessariis unitas, in non necessariis libertas, in omnibus caritas* (in essentials unity, in nonessentials liberty, in all things charity). *In essentials unity* refers to the beliefs necessary to be called a Christian such as the resurrection of Jesus Christ.[102] *In nonessentials liberty* recognizes there are things in which no consensus has been achieved between the different church traditions (for example speaking in tongues). *In all things charity* is the declaration that Christian relationships are characterized by love, even

[101] McGrath, *Heresy*, 33.
[102] It is worth mentioning that an increasing number of people self-identified as Christians do not believe in the literal resurrection of Christ, a BBC article serves as an example https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-39153121

when conflicts arise.[103] This principle reminds us that faith is not only a matter of *what* we believe, but of *how* we believe.

Doctrinal taxonomies usually take the form of three circles with the one at the center being the most important. Tony Scarcello suggests the first circle to be *the essentials*, the second circle to be *dogma* (topics heavily affirmed and embraced), and the third circle to be *opinions* held loosely.[104] Wittmer proposes that the central circle be what Christians *must believe*, the following what Christians *must not reject*, and the third what Christians *should believe*.[105] Albert Mohler also suggests theological doctrines comprised of the essentials of Christian faith should be located at the first-level, at the second-level doctrines which generate significant boundaries among Christians, and at the third level doctrines which being minor do not really separate believers even in the same faith community.[106]

Paul's pastoral approach of *commandments*, *concessions*, and *opinions* could be seen as the practical application of a similar method. This practical wisdom can be very helpful in dealing with deconstruction on a communal level.

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[103] Putman, *When Doctrine Divides the People of God*, 214.
[104] Tony Scarcello, *Regenerate: Following Jesus After Deconstruction* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2020), 129.
[105] Michael E. Wittmer, *Don't Stop Believing: Why Living Like Jesus is Not Enough* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2008), 43.
[106] R. Albert Mohler Jr., "A Call for Theological Triage and Christian Maturity," albertmohler.com, July 12, 2005, http://www.albertmohler.com/2005/07/12/a-call-for-theological-triage-and-christian-maturity/.

3.4.2.3.3. How to believe: Love

"Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up."[107] This simple principle attests to the importance Paul gave to *how* Christians believe. Christians in general, whether they are experiencing deconstruction of their faith or not, are prone to mistake knowledge by itself as enough for Christian life. Conversations around deconstruction of faith can become unfruitful intellectual discussions focused on the "right" knowledge. As demonstrated above, what we believe is important, but the Bible calls us to pay attention to *how* we believe, too.

Deconstruction thrives on tensions; it does not rush to solve them. Love is the ultimate tension generator because it fosters deep connections with others. Maly finds the Corinthians to be "fixated with 'individual edification' (*Erbauung*) as against 'corporate construction' (*Aufbau*) of the whole church together."[108] While a loving search for understanding builds others and oneself, an individualistic search for knowledge has terrible consequences, it does not simply offends but destroys others; this is Paul's ultimate concern.[109] Their knowledge and actions regarding food consumption does not affect their relationship with God at all, but it does affect their relationship with their brothers and sisters. The seriousness with which Paul deals with this might be repelled by modern individualistic worldviews.

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[107] 1 Cor 8.1

[108] Karl Maly, *Mündige Gemeinde: Untersuchungen Zur Pastoralen Führung Des Apostels Paulus Im 1. Korintherbrief*, Stuttgarter Biblische Monographien, 2. (Stuttgart: Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1967), 101.

[109] 1 Cor 8.11 and Hays, *First Corinthians,* 142.

Conversations around deconstruction of faith need to be reframed and treated under different standards than just knowledge, not as a form of gaslighting and avoiding hard conversations, but out of a genuine understanding that "knowledge is defective if it fails to build up the community in love."[110] The faith others hold is to be regarded as holy and is only to be approached with a loving heart; there is no true discipleship without love.

The tension love creates, where deconstruction thrives, involves finding the balance between self-assertion and community edification; it demands self-imposing limits while using knowledge to build others up. Practical examples in churches might revolve around things like listening to secular music, differentiating yoga as an exercise from a form of spirituality, and consuming alcohol. The words of Hays are remarkable, "1 Corinthians 8 must be read as a compelling invitation to the 'strong' Corinthians to come over and join Paul at the table with the weak."[111] Only love can build a table robust and big enough where knowledge can be served even if it is not shared by all, and love itself is also the main course.

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[110] Ibid., 137.
[111] Hays, *First Corinthians*, 142.

3.4.2.4. The Blessing of One body

The imagery of a table of love leads us to the famous metaphor of the body. This metaphor found in First Corinthians harmonizes with the Johannine imagery of the vine, a metaphor which suggests an ecclesiology "based squarely on the concept of unity among believers and with Christ."[112] The Corinthian letter expands the ecclesiology of unity to an ecclesiology of *diversity in unity*.[113] The dissimilarities in the church need not lead to division. There is an interdependent relationship that produces an understanding of one's pain as everyone's pain and one's honor as everyone's honor.[114] No member is able to thrive without the other. This truth is not lived in an esoteric fashion in which the church is seen as an unintelligible group of isolated individuals. The body dynamic manifests itself in daily communion and personal contact with one another's gifts.

How this community looks like might be similar to Balswick *et. al.'s* theory of *The Reciprocating Self*: "the reciprocating self is the self that in all its uniqueness and fullness of being engages fully in relationship with another in all its particularity. . . where distinction and unity are experienced simultaneously."[115] For these authors, a trinitarian perspective entails that "the purpose in life is to be in a reciprocating relationship with

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[112] D. Moody Smith, *The Theology of the Gospel of John*, New Testament Theology (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 152.
[113] Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 666.
[114] Hays, *First Corinthians*, 216.
[115] Jack O. Balswick, Pamela Ebstyne King, and Kevin S. Reimer, *The Reciprocating Self: Human Development in Theological Perspective* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2016), 54.

God and others"[116] in which a mature person has "the capacity and inclination to reciprocate each of these characteristics: "to love and be loved, to forgive and be forgiven, to empower and be empowered, and to know and to be known."[117] Such maturity produces a differentiated faith that finds the right balance between unity and uniqueness with God and others.[118]

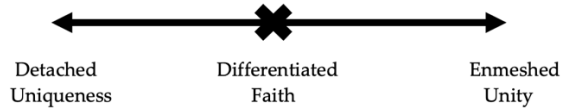

Figure 6 Differentiated faith

Both unity *and* diversity are the marks of a healthy church by New Testament standards. Life in such a community is filled with challenges, tensions, and miracles. Perhaps, what might seem like a threat can lead to a faith community that fully enjoys God's provision for those who are facing the unknown.

Conclusion, the pragmatic task

An important part of being a leader is running experiments. Not every strategy will be successful, which is why pastors must hold loosely to them, having the wisdom

[116] Ibid., 334.
[117] Ibid., 351.
[118] Ibid., 333-334.

to know when to insist and when to desist. Lartey proposes a pastoral cycle that constantly moves from *experience*, to *exploration*, to *reflection*, to *response*, and finally to *new experience*.[119] This never-ending cycle demands constant brainstorming, implementation, and learning. A strategy that does not work is not harmful if expectations are managed, consequences are measured, and egos are healthy. Pastors should not blindly run after change, they should change things for the sake of growth and maturity.

A pastoral heart that engages in the pragmatic task cultivates a life of servant leadership. The strategies born of a servant leader's heart will in return help the congregation "to change in ways that more fully embody the servanthood of Christ."[120] Dare I say, the ultimate characteristic of Christ's servant heart is *kenotic love*.

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[119] Lartey, *Pastoral Theology in an Intercultural World,* 84.
[120] Osmer, *Practical Theology*, 192.

4. Conclusion

The wise words of Qoheleth are extremely relevant for pastoral ministry today: "Do not say, 'Why were the old days better than these days?' for it is not wise to ask that."[1] Pastoral ministry has been challenging in every age the church has gone through; but it is *today*, in Postmodern times, when the Lord has appointed *us* as pastors. Postmodernity and deconstruction are just another challenge in the long history of pastoral ministry. Pastors should follow the wisdom of the ancient teacher of Ecclesiastes and not invest their energy yearning for that which once was; they instead, try to faithfully discern what the Spirit is doing in the present, so they themselves can follow him while teaching others to do it as well.

Deconstruction is something that happens, it happens from the inside, it is not a method, it is call, it is a yes to the other, and it is affirmative of institutions. These six characteristics can help pastors care for people in their congregations who are going through deconstructive processes. Moreover, it is my hope that these six characteristics of deconstruction can help pastors cultivate deconstructive processes as part of the work of discipleship, understanding that the church is the best place where divine destruction and renewal of faith, as a work of the Spirit, should happen. It is the transformational work of the Spirit through the Scriptures, the believing community, and mystical experiences with God that pastors crave and not deconstruction itself.

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[1] Ecclesiastes 7.10

Pastoral theology is by nature practical with a keen interest in pastoral care. "The art of pastoral theology explores the rationale, nature and ethos of care, as practiced by and through communities of faith. Pastoral theology, which is by its very nature a reflective practice, can be found in the various caring activities of persons and communities."[2] Pastoral theology is a theology concerned with the divine-human relationship; it is rooted and tested in practice, and it arises from specific historical, geographical, socio-political, economic, and cultural contexts.[3] According to Woodward and Pattison, pastoral or practical theology is transformational because it works towards making a difference not only in a person´s understanding but in his or her actual life situation. It addresses the human situation holistically, bringing together logical propositions, human emotions, the *symbolic*, and even what may appear as irrational, making the religious experience relevant in a person's life. Pastoral theology proudly embraces the adjective of *unsystematic*, in Woodward and Pattison's view, since it makes no claim to universal validity because of its highly contextual nature.[4]

This view harmonizes with a Pentecostal perspective, from which the classical-clerical paradigm risks losing sight of the pneumatic community in which every single believer has been filled with the Spirit to minister to one another. It could also threaten

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[2] Emmanuel Y. Lartey, *Pastoral Theology in an Intercultural World* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2006), 3.
[3] Ibid., 5, 12.
[4] James Woodward and Stephen Pattison, *The Blackwell Reader in Pastoral and Practical Theology* (Oxford, UK and Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2000), 13-16.

pneumatic creativity by replacing dependance on the Holy Spirit with recipe-like answers. Yes, the classical-clerical paradigm connects the pastor to a rich ministry tradition, but this should never cost the congregation their minister's inquisitive spirit. The pastor should constantly ask relevant questions amid the Spirit's movement in the congregation and its immediate context. Pastoral theology should consider the classical-clerical paradigm, but also the clinical, contextual, and postmodern dimensions of ministry. This approach invites the whole community of faith to follow the Spirit in very specific ways.

From a Pentecostal perspective, the pastor does not minister to the community from above but from within. The pastor is one anointed believer among many anointed believers, called to serve his or her community with a specific authority that is exercised lovingly for the sake of an empowered people. Wilkins succinctly points out some of the main differences in how different faith traditions approach pastoral theology.[5] According to him, the Roman Catholic emphasis on sin as the problem produces a pastoral theology concerned with the nurture of souls and their preparation for heaven. The Lutheran emphasis on faithlessness (pride, self-righteousness, lack of trust, and anxiety) yields a pastoral theology preoccupied with inducing feelings of despair and repentance, followed by encouragement to have faith. Anglican pastoral theology seeks

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[5] M. J. Wilkins, "Pastoral Theology," *Dictionary of Latter New Testament and Its Developments* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1997), 876.

to restore order by embodying the grace of God because of its conception of sin as an inward, interpersonal, and social disorder. Reformed pastoral theology is concerned with the Christian need for concrete assurance of their foreordination to salvation, leading to a focus on procedures to determine the true state of souls and achieving evidence of their security.

A Pentecostal approach to pastoral theology would gravitate around its self-understanding as a renewal movement, remaining radically open to the unexpected move of Spirit, while connecting the individual to a charismatic community by an emotive, narrative epistemology. The resulting pastoral theology would help believers locate themselves within the story of God and the people of God, allowing the Spirit to guide them into new seasons of renewal and growth within the divine purposes. The sensibility of being a movement and the value of participation would bring the pastor and the believer into a relationship of equals in which the pastor understands herself as being in a position of authority expressed as a gift to the believer. The relationship would have the mark of *koinonia*, following the trinitarian example. The holistic nature of a Pentecostal pastoral theology would result in a genuine concern for the full wellbeing of the believer, validating emotional responses and allowing them to find expression in the presence of God and the community.

It is my hope that I have shown ways in which a Pentecostal pastoral theology like the one just mentioned can take place in Latin American Pentecostal congregations.

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